M. Cunningham

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EVERY DOG

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EVERY DOG

By

E. & V. PRINGLE-WEST

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"ONCE UPON A TIME——"

THE waiting-room at Brogsford Junction was enlivened by a single advertisement which recommended Keating's Powder. For the rest, it was hardly an inspiring place. The walls, distempered in mustard-colour, were murky with grime and pencilled initials. The windows were filmed. It smelled of gas. There were cigarette-ends and a banana-skin in the grate.

A lethargic porter, drooping on his legs before the door, stood guard over certain sober, workmanlike and gentlemanly pieces of luggage, while their owner wrote a letter at the table within. Unmistakably he was the owner of that luggage—a gentleman, plain, middle-aged and staid. The porter might have reflected on the relation between luggage and personality, which he had fine opportunities of observing, had he been an observant or reflective man—which he was not. He was a man, indeed, under whose nose the strangest things might happen without his being very much the wiser. He took no note, for instance, of the somewhat extraordinary circumstance that the gentleman in the waiting-room, when he had finished his writing, looked about him as if exhilarated by his surroundings.

He was a person of contradictory aspect, with that in his eye which belied his general effect of settled dulness.

He addressed an envelope and enclosed his letter, after reading it over with business-like care. Another envelope lay on the table beside him, a direction scribbled on the back. He took certain papers out of this, half-thrust them in with his letter, withdrew them

again and sat for a moment, hesitating. Then his eye wandered to where the porter, still on guard over his modest baggage, stood as if posed for the type of all stultified drudgery, taking no interest in anything but the space of concrete between his feet, and not much in that.

"No!" said the traveller, below his breath, but fervently. "I should become like him. Findon must do it."

His hand of its own accord slid the questionable papers into an envelope, and he did not even look down to make sure it was the right one, as should have been natural to a man so methodical in all his ways. Instead he looked up at the advertisement of Keating's, a recondite amusement changing the set lines of his face. There was such a pleasant suggestion in that placard of far, romantic travels in countries little known. He took a passport out of his pocket and read over the long list of countries for which it was endorsed. He read it again and again, oblivious of time and of his writing-things strewn over the table, till the porter put his head in.

"She's coming now, sir. You'll have to look sharp, sir."

As he grabbed up his things, the envelope with the scribbled name on the back slipped through his flustered fingers. Empty, he thought it, and in his hurry let it lie.

There was time, after all, for him to take his seat comfortably in the Liverpool train, and to look the porter up and down before rewarding his services.

"Do you—ever take a holiday?" He shot out the question with a shy man's abruptness.

"Can't afford no holidays in my line of life," said the drudge.

"No?"

The train drew out, leaving the porter shocked for once into animation, with a ten-pound note in his hand.

* * * * * *

A few minutes later, when Jack Russell inquired of him about trains for the north, he answered with a great affability, and even seemed disposed for general conversation, though the young gentleman was carrying his own suitcase and altogether looked unprofitable.

Mr. Jack Russell was still in the stage of youth that likes to be thought mature. He had a bright complexion only just toned down to manliness by a fresh coat of weather-tan, and fair hair that crinkled when cut too short to curl. His was a face where depression showed up like an inkstain on a white tablecloth.

" Nice weather for a holiday, sir," observed the porter.

For one who was at the end of the only blessed free fortnight in the grinding year, who was leaving behind the comforts of home and the joys of the country, and was going back to a detestable job in a factory town, such words had a sting. They drove Jack into the waiting-room, away from the spring sunshine and the sound of the porter's voice.

The whole forlornness of that fateful place came home to him at the first glance. His second glance lighted on the envelope on the table. Idly he looked at it. On it was written—as he read: " For Finder," the last word underlined with a short, emphatic stroke.

Jack's heavy brow lightened, and he grinned. He drew out what was in the envelope with cautious fingers. Judging by what he himself might have left addressed to " Finder " in a public place, he supposed the contents to be something that would jump—some choice patent device for surprising the unwary—which, with care, might be reset and left for the next comer.

The sheet of paper that came out, pinned to a close-written letter, did not in any way go off. But he would have been considerably less startled if it had. He whistled and wrinkled his forehead, and finally sat on the table and read through the document again down to the signature, at which he remained staring.

"Oh, Lord!" he murmured. "Pavington? Old Pavington, of all men!"

He went out and caught the porter.

"Who—er—what kind of person was in the waiting-room last? Can you tell me?" he inquired.

"There was a gentleman writing there," responded the porter with an awakened expression.

"Biggish, oldish chap?"

"Tall, yes. Fine-looking man, sir. Youngish."

Jack appeared surprised.

"Did he—er—seem to be scattering things about much? Leaving 'em behind—by accident, you know?"

The porter resented the idea of accident.

"Whatever that gentleman left in this station, sir," he said, with feeling, "he left it because he meant to, and you may take it from me."

"Oh, thanks," said Jack; and he went back and read the close-written letter.

He read it with an amazement that grew in intensity till he could no longer endure it without the relief of speech.

"'Six hundred a year,'" he quoted to the dingy walls. "'Entire management of the estate—farm, tenants, timber.' Someone she can rely on and implicitly trust. And she has entire confidence that her cousin Pavington will find her a satisfactory person and send him over with as little delay as possible. Oh, Lord!"

The signed document attached recommended "bearer" to a Miss Pringle for the post of estate agent on the terms detailed in her letter.

"It's as well for Miss Lavinia Pringle that this happened into respectable hands," said Jack Russell to himself, with modest self-righteousness.

PART I
PAVINGTON

CHAPTER I

THE WORM WILL TURN

A WEEK before this occurrence at Brogsford, Lord Pavington's solicitor had gone down to Pavington Court, surprised at a sudden summons from his client.

"And what the deuce does he want with two thousand pounds in notes?" he asked himself as he travelled down from London.

The legal firm of Findon, Harte and Barker had done business for the Vane family through several generations. The senior partner knew the present earl probably better than anyone else did, and believed in him as a sound man and a conscientious peer.

"But what does he want with twenty hundred-pound notes?" he asked himself again. "This is Pavington all over. The most normal, businesslike man on earth for three hundred and sixty-four days out of the year, and on the three hundred and sixty-fifth he'll do some queer thing—or think of doing it." Mr. Findon held with the normal, and was comfortably aware of his own influence.

Lord Pavington, meanwhile, in the chair at a board meeting in Tiddon Magna, was announcing, in the same impersonal voice in which he read the minutes, that he would be unable to attend further meetings this year, as he was going abroad. A dutiful murmur of regret just drowned the breath of relief breathed by a dozen well-meaning committee-men at this news. Their chairman's personality oppressed them, for he was formal in manner and they reckoned him proud. Also he had just reminded them for the nine hundred

and ninety-ninth time that public moneys must be administered according to rule, and not local prejudice.

The chairman, for his part, might rejoice with a more intense sense of deliverance to think that he would not be there, next meeting, to do the same thankless thing for the thousandth time. But he hid that feeling with all others under his habitual air of impassivity. He did not even give undivided attention to the meeting's polite regret, being preoccupied with alarm at the thought that the moment was coming for him to make his personal adieux.

He had an honest liking for these men, and alone in his car beforehand, it had seemed the most simple, natural thing in the world to shake them each one by the hand in a friendly way and ask for their good wishes for his travels. But, face to face with their dozen intimidating corporeal presences, nothing was simple or natural. Pavington knew that he was a fool to be intimidated, for these were strictly ordinary persons and in no wise fierce. But he knew, too, what deep truth underlies the myths of the Gorgon and the Basilisk. These creatures' petrifying power truly dwelt in every human eye when it was directed on one cursed, like himself, with a lack of self-assurance. Under a dozen pairs of eyes he became one cold lump of unhappy stupidity, as capable of genial manners as if he were literally turned to stone.

The meeting broke up, and no one showed any sign of expecting individual notice from the earl. His shyness forbade his doing what was unexpected, and he walked out, the incarnation—in the view of Tiddon Magna—of stiff and aloof aristocracy.

The same car which was taking him back to Pavington Court was to meet Mr. Findon at Pavington station. There was no time to spare, and he sent the car on straight from the point where the road touched his own land, himself walking home through the fields. There would be much business to see to in the next days, and

this would be his last chance of looking over his farm, the one thing that he left with some regret. He was, besides, a simple-minded person, and took pleasure in small things. The tiny leaves coming out along the honeysuckle sprays; the early notes of birds that were all familiar to him, keen as he was of eye and ear; even the smell of the wet earth was a joy, this first mild, growing day of the year. But there was yet another reason why he preferred tramping in the rain to going on to the station to meet an old friend. He recognised with shame that it was his dread of the moment when he must tell Findon why he had sent for him.

The family solicitor was his best friend, and he could not afford to quarrel with him. He had not so many friends; no near relations; no one to miss him particularly when he went abroad. Tiddon Magna heard of his departure with a slight relief, and the county would not notice it. It was a gay county, dominated by the pursuits of the young, in which he had, of course, no part.

Of Findon's kindly interest he was sure. But Findon was not a man who ever expected novelties; and it was a very new thing for Pavington to ask anyone to take all his affairs off his hands for a year, while he went away beyond reach of post and cable.

Findon, on the other hand, had for some fifteen years been urging that it was the duty of a man in Pavington's position to provide himself with a wife. Findon had the strongest sense of other people's duty. He had always a list of eligible candidates for the post of Countess of Pavington, tabled in order of merit. If they were little more than names to the unsocial earl, Findon said it was his own fault, and one easily repaired. When he now confessed that, far from doing as he should in this respect, he was going to travel to the remotest end of the earth that he could get to in a year, Findon could not be expected to approve. Pavington was of a passive and tractable disposition, though not

to the extent of being married against his will. Short of that, he had always been guided by Findon's advice, and he dreaded a disagreement.

To keep himself from growing nervous, he threw his mind into a certain scheme which he hoped Findon might set working while he was away. It was the pet one of many schemes that he had never been able to put in practice himself. Having the fatal habit of allowing always for the other man's point of view, he could not plague his farmer-neighbours with progressive ideas which they did not want. But Findon rather enjoyed harrying people for their good. It would certainly be for the good of the agricultural community to choose the ablest of its young men to go to Denmark and study new methods. If the community would find the man, Pavington would provide the funds—endow a travelling scholarship. But the youth must be tested for character as well as brains by a specially devised process of his own. Since the right opportunity could not be assured to every man in this life, it was the more important to secure the right man for every opportunity.

Pavington felt strongly on this subject of opportunity. He might have been a different man himself if circumstances had not always imprisoned him. Not that he thought of blaming anyone for the circumstances. Fate had sent him too late in their life to his serious-minded parents, and they had had too-anxious consciences concerning a precious only child. They had kept the boy always with his elders, since other children might have a corrupting influence; cockered and checked and repressed him; never sent him to school. So Bernard Vane remained outside the freemasonry of youth, and wasted his years at Oxford in cultivating his mind. Then, educated and informed to that degree that he could not take an honest pleasure in platitude, he found himself handicapped in the county society. His shy distrust of himself got him the

name of pride. His was not the disposition to overcome natural disabilities. He accepted his early social failures as final, and withdrew into a world that was made up of books, and the life of the fields, and the ever-growing burden of the duties of his rank—a world where, since his parents' death, he was altogether alone.

Even the War was fated to affect him less than all the rest of the world. His horse had fallen with him in the spring of '14, and an injury to his knee, whose effects had only worn off after years, made him too lame for anything but work in inglorious offices at home.

In normal times there were his tenants to be looked after, and the charitable institutions which his parents had founded. He must take an interest in the livings in his gift. It was his business to unravel the affairs of all his incompetent poor relations. It was his part to preside over local committees; to urge unpopular reforms in the County Council; to act as trustee for public funds. He was a useful man in his own way—sound, reliable, painstaking. Every thankless task in the county and borough fell to Lord Pavington as a matter of course, and as a matter of course he had accepted all—till now.

On the eve of his fortieth birthday, his inner self revolted. He had never had a change in all his life. He had always been doing these things, or learning to do them. Now he must get away, right away, and be able to breathe—just once, before it was quite too late.

He reached the Court in time to welcome Mr. Findon, who expressed himself as heartily glad to have arrived without having his throat cut.

"I've brought the money, as you instructed me," he said, without concealing his dislike of the commission. His face, smooth, pink and genial as it was, could express a formidable disapproval. It was a bad opening, and Pavington said that they could go into that matter later.

Later, in the library, he still put off the evil hour, and entered first on that scheme for which he wanted to inspire his capable friend with enthusiasm.

"I was thinking," he said, "of starting an agricultural travelling scholarship."

The Londoner grunted. 'Agricultural' was for him an uninspiring word, standing for clammy soil and bucolic stupidity. He was a man who, if he must be out of doors, preferred pavement to soil, and the inside of a limousine to either.

"Did you want twenty hundred-pound notes to start your scholar?" he inquired.

"Er—no," said Pavington.

The pregnant phrases in which he had meant to expound all that he had been thinking left his tongue and fled back to the secret chambers of his brain. Find the right man for every opportunity? Obviously he was not the right man to awake Findon to a sense of the fundamental importance of the land. He outlined baldly the conditions he would attach to his scholarship. Without having any overweening opinion of himself, he could not but think they were well conceived and ingenious, and hope that Findon would be impressed. But as he described them, Findon thought them tedious, and did not attend for long. He chiefly noted that this was the three hundred and sixty-fifth day, and that his client was wanting to do something irregular.

"It would be waste for the wrong man to get the chance," Pavington ended lamely.

"It would be waste in any case," declared Findon. "Of course you can afford to throw about more money than most people. But if you really want this thing, you must put it through yourself. It's not in my line."

So much for that.

"Now, about these hundred-pound notes," he continued. "I want to hand them over. Twenty of them!"

Explanation could no longer be evaded.

"The fact is," Pavington said, "I—well, I thought of taking a holiday."

"Why?" said Findon. "You never did before."

"That," said Pavington, "is just the reason."

Mr. Findon himself took a holiday every year at the proper holiday season. But he did not prepare for it by providing himself with twenty Bank of England notes for a hundred pounds, and he said so.

"The—the fact is, I thought of being away for a year."

"A what?" Findon was startled by his client's strange remark, but did not take it seriously. "You might get away for a fortnight, I suppose, if you really want to, but——"

"I want to put all my affairs into your hands for a year," said Pavington, with gathering firmness. "I must be free for this year to travel, and I shall not want anything forwarded."

This was the three hundred and sixty-fifth day with a vengeance.

"But you know, my dear fellow," Findon said, in his composing tones. "Seriously, you know, you can't do this. You owe something to your position. And it isn't even as if you were younger and would enjoy knocking about." Only real devotion had brought the stout lawyer himself down, first class, from London. Travel was not his idea of enjoyment. "No, at your time of life your business is to marry and settle down."

As regards the latter part of this recommendation, Pavington failed to see how he could achieve a more settled state than he was in already.

"Anyhow, what the deuce do you want a holiday *from?*" Findon pursued, casting his eyes round the comfortable, sober library.

Pavington wanted a holiday from himself. He, Bernard Vane, was even more oppressed by the person-

ality of Pavington than were his neighbours. But he did not see his way to explaining this to Findon.

It was a terrible interview—worse even than he had feared. He was hardly a strong-minded man, and it excruciated his feelings to have to force through a project which he could neither explain nor justify against the determined opposition of a trusted friend and counsellor. Findon did not like the project in any way. He did not like the look of the mass of business that was laid before him. He was elderly and prosperous, of a comfortable figure, and coveted leisure more than fees. Besides, he had always believed in Pavington's sanity above everything, and hated to have his ideas upset.

"I won't be able to give the personal attention to all this that you can," he grumbled. "Everything will go to the deuce." Finally he bethought him of a clinching argument. "I think you're forgetting," he said in triumph, "that there may be a by-election here at any moment."

The earl had not by any means forgotten. Of all things he hated elections and electioneering, and the publicity and futility of his part as county magnate. His position as a peer of the realm, so sacred to Findon, was to his own mind an anachronism, and he would never be able to act his part with the proper conviction.

"It's the safest seat in England," he said. "In any case, it is not as if I had much personal influence."

"There you see what comes of your not being married. If there were a Lady Pavington——"

"I'll promise to consider that when I come home," said Pavington, with an attempted smile.

"What about this cash?" Findon went on. "You do not, I presume, mean to set out with two thousand pounds in your suitcase?"

"In my pocket, I think would be safer."

The lawyer exclaimed in horror.

"But a letter of credit, or——"

"I have no fixed route," Pavington interrupted

hastily and guiltily. He did not mean Findon to know that he had arranged to travel under an assumed name. He was going to make quite sure of his escape. So he said vaguely that he did not want to be tied, and that Bank of England notes would go anywhere.

Finally convinced that remonstrance was useless, the dumbfounded lawyer accepted the charge of all Pavington's business. But he extorted a promise that his client should let him have a 'poste restante' or bank address for the case of emergency. An emergency, he thought, considering the amount of troublesome things to be attended to, might easily arise.

Pavington had meant to cut himself clean off from the world of petty duties and make it impossible for Findon to recall him. He had procured a passport made out for plain Bernard West, and meant to open an account in that name in South America. But, as usual, Findon had reason on his side, and he had to give in so far as to promise to send a card with an address from the other side of the Atlantic.

"Send two cards," said Findon. "One might get lost in the post." He was determined that the traveller should report himself, for the two thousand pounds worried him.

The transference of Pavington's concerns to Findon was not arranged in a moment, nor yet in a day, for they shared the quality of being slow and thorough. All had to be arranged with infinite elaboration. As to new questions that might arise, the confidential old butler, Symmons, was to forward any correspondence that seemed of importance to the London office for Findon to deal with according to his own discretion.

CHAPTER II

STARTING IN HASTE——

WHEN finally Findon took leave of his client, grudgingly but affectionately wishing him joy of his madness, Pavington had all too little time to deal with the flood of local business poured in upon him at the last moment. He was to sail on the 4th of February, and should have started for Liverpool by an early train. But when the morning came a troublesome tenant caught him for a last interview and delayed him till too late.

He might still just catch his boat by the next train. On his way to the station in the car the postman met him with the second post. From force of habit he accepted the budget offered him—a harmless lot of circulars. But one private letter lurked among them. It was from his Irish mother's first cousin, Lavinia Pringle, whom he had never seen. Why had he not had presence of mind to send the postman on to the Court? Had he shaken off all encumbrances only to have a fresh one foisted on him now? Must he give up his last chance of catching this boat to hunt for an estate agent for this unknown cousin, because she happened to have no nearer relation to whom she could turn in a difficulty?

It did not occur to Pavington to write and decline the commission. But after reflection he decided that he could leave it to Findon. Findon would do it as well as he and better.

In the train he wrote and signed an introduction to Miss Pringle, to be given to the chosen man. He put it with his cousin's letter into an envelope, and noted

'For Findon' on it, lest it should escape him. He missed his orderly desk, and it was hard to write legibly in the shaking train. He did not begin the covering letter of minute instructions till he got out at the junction, where there was a half-hour's wait.

So it came about that he wrote to Mr. Findon in the waiting-room at Brogsford, and left on the table there the enclosures which occasioned Mr. Jack Russell such surprise.

There was not time to post the letter at Brogsford, but there would be at Liverpool. Pavington travelled on, happily unconscious of what he had left behind. Having, as he believed, set his cousin's business in good train, he put the matter out of his mind and gave himself up to enjoyment of his liberty.

The liner had sailed before he got to Liverpool. But there was time enough to catch it up at Queenstown. He did not regret this modification of his plans, and looked out with curiosity next morning, on his way through the Irish midlands. The country roads wound away enticingly to one side and the other of the line. Low white houses flashed, dazzling, in the sun, and their families waved to the train with so confiding a friendliness that he was tempted to wave back. Because he was half Irish—he supposed—the land appealed to him, with its free and informal air, its wild hedgerows, and open sweeps of bog. A young country—he thought—full of possibilities and romance, a country where anything might happen.

He would carry a vision of it round the world. But the picture should have life in the foreground, and none of the human life he had glimpsed was adequate to his expectations. Then at a wayside station he saw what he wanted. A girl came down the platform. It was something in her walk that struck him first. There was a spring in it. She was light and erect; her face not beautiful, but attractive with its look of health—health of mind as well as of body—and something

more. What the more exactly was, he could not say, only that it was what he liked to see against that spacious, many-coloured background.

She disappeared into a compartment behind him. That was at Geraldstown West, and the next station was Kilcashel. It occurred to him, as the train gathered speed again on a down-grade, that Kilcashel was the post-town for that confounded Pringle estate that had so nearly entangled him. He would like to know whether the place was anywhere near. How pleasant to be rattling past it, leaving all the bother to Findon!

By the way, had he ever posted that letter to Findon at Liverpool? He felt in his overcoat pocket. No. For the first time in his life he had forgotten to post a letter. It was a shock to Lord Pavington. He must pull himself up. It was not seemly, at his time of life, to get excited like a schoolboy and forget things. All the same, he was just as glad that the letter should only be posted at the last minute before he embarked, lest Findon have time to discover an emergency and wire to him.

The train seemed to feel the urgency of his desire for escape. It was taking a bend at a great speed. He had heard someone saying that it was a brand-new engine——

A furious jolt, and the coach was off the rails. Pavington realised it, and wondered what would happen next. He crammed his overcoat between his head and the window-glass.

What exactly did happen next he never knew.

CHAPTER III

A SQUARE PEG IN A ROUND HOLE

JACK RUSSELL, that evening, leant back in his chair by means of tipping it up on its hind legs with its back against one wall of the room while his own feet rested against the wall opposite.

"Always thought Pavington was a respectable old stick," he said. "Dead respectable! And supposing he was screwed, who'd have thought he'd have the imagination for a stunt like this?"

Jack was contemplating Lord Pavington's signature with unabated surprise, by the light of a naked gas-jet, in his very small room at the top of a boarding-house that smelt of cabbage. He knew all about the earl by repute, though he might not have recognised him if he had met him. His modest home lay in the same county as Pavington Court. Had it not been for the unmistakable, if shaky signature, he would have thought those papers left for 'Finder' were somebody's little joke. But that was beyond what he could believe of Pavington.

"Either he's drunk, or mad, or it's a dashed careless mistake. In any case, it's playing it pretty low down on his cousin Lavinia. And I won't just shoot the chit back to him without knowing what he's going to do about it next. His Lordship may jolly well tootle up here in his Rolls-Royce and fetch it if he wants it."

Forthwith Jack wrote to the Earl of Pavington at Pavington Court, saying that, certain documents having this day reached his hands, at Brogsford, in a manner which appeared to him irregular, he would be glad to

know whether Lord Pavington regarded the matter as in order. If not, he could make it convenient to see his Lordship any evening after five, by appointment, at above address.

On consideration, and feeling really responsible for safeguarding Miss Pringle's interests as far as possible, he rewrote this communication and put his last sentence differently.

Then he leant back again.

"Suppose he is mad, and really meant to do it. Suppose he was to say: 'Fire ahead!'"

Six hundred a year, and a job out of doors in the country. Either were paradise enough. And the two combined were there for the bearer of the note in his hand. He thought of the home he had left that morning. Since their father's death it had been a hard struggle for their mother to keep it going and as jolly as it always had been for the six of them. He knew, being the eldest. This time she had not been able to put all the worries out of sight. There were mounting bills that could not be paid off; and Joan, the youngest, who was delicate; and Bobbie, who ought to be at school. It was beastly, leaving things like that; and what he earned was so little more than enough to keep himself.

It seemed an æon of slavery since, at seventeen, he had accepted the place in a bank offered by the father of one of his innumerable school friends. There had been nothing else to do, and he was jolly lucky to get it, considering that he hadn't any brains. But how he loathed it! And how should he ever escape?

Unless, of course, Lord Pavington was mad.

He could tackle that job, if he could anything. He really knew something about estate management. There wasn't much he wasn't up to about his grandfather's place in the old days. And at fellows' people's places where he'd stayed—you couldn't help picking things up as you went along, when they were what you

were interested in. Moreover, Jack Russell was not without a certain confidence that the jobs that he tackled got done. It was not that he thought of himself as a particularly capable youth. He was not given to thinking too much about anything.

Waste of time, telling oneself fairy tales. There was the bell for dinner; and Jack hastened down to the hot ham and greens, underdone rice and egg-powder custard.

He heard by return from Pavington Court, from Symmons, to the effect that his Lordship had gone abroad for an indefinite period, and could not attend to any correspondence.

"Dependable, business-like man!" Jack quoted county opinion with irony. "And poor Miss Lavinia whistling for her agent!"

Then the great resolution came. Miss Pringle should have her agent.

Why not?

Of course, he would have to go over himself, since he had no references to send. He must wangle special leave, and get his original patron to see that the bank did not stand in his light. He must borrow five pounds for the journey. There were friends enough who would lend it between them. If he failed, it would take long enough to repay it, and it was a frightful lot of money to waste. But even the wild chance was worth risking more than that for. The dismal air of the Black Country grew radiant before him with the dawn of adventure. His mind was made up, and he was not slow to act on his decision. Before the end of the week he was on his way to present himself at Miss Lavinia Pringle's place in Ireland.

CHAPTER IV

IT'S A LONG LANE——

ARDREENAN, the goal of Jack's journey, lay seven miles out from the town of Kilcashel. The house stood back among the woods in dignified seclusion. A formal, comfortable place, with well-kept grounds and garden, it had stood through the years aloof from the bustle and stress of life. Aloof for good and ill, untroubled by the Bad Times, unstirred by the gay days of old. Its mistress woke to each uneventful day as calmly as she had wakened the day before.

The world passed it by—the restless, new-fangled world, that is, that drove in motors along the county road, which made a wide bend to skirt the property. The world that went in ass-carts, painted blue with red wheels, had license to make the short cut in at one avenue gate and out at the other. So long as it went round by the estate office, and did not parade past the very hall door of the house itself, as certain shopkeepers' families out of Kilcashel had done—and found the gates closed to them the next time.

"And who do you think it was last, ma'am?" said Lanktree, the maid of forty years' standing, as she helped the mistress change her gown for the afternoon. "Who should it be but Mrs. O'Mackesey, no less! There's some people too busy going round looking for a handle to their name to have time to mind their manners to their betters."

Miss Pringle made a little sound of annoyance.

"How very vexing that this should happen! I am particularly sorry that there should be anything more

to offend poor Mrs. Mackesey. But can I apologise for the consequence of her bad behaviour?" A little twinkle in the mistress' eyes was lost on the maid.

"I'd say the road was good enough for her likes," Lanktree averred with expression. "And too good. Of all the ignorant women! Mrs. Andrew O'Mackesey! And Andy Mack, that was reared at the back of the hill——"

"It is the more credit to Mackesey to have got on so well," Miss Pringle checked her.

"Oh, no one would say a word to poor Andy if it wasn't for the wife. It wasn't he thought of putting in for the agency. Will you want to wear your silk, ma'am? There'll nobody come in the rain to-day, unless Miss Percival. Every drop would scald a cricket."

"My dear Lanktree! Do you suppose Miss Honor could come, even if it wasn't sluicing? She must at least stay at home and attend to those poor people, when she insisted on taking them in after the railway accident. I should think it would have been a great deal better for them to go home or to hospital, even if it was further to take them. I must say young people are very odd, the things they do."

"Ah, and headstrong! You may be talking, ma'am. But indeed, poor little Miss Honor, what is she but a child?"

"Yes, indeed, and with no mother to see after her. But she undertakes too much."

Miss Pringle shook her head in kindly disapproval. She could not understand the sturdy goddaughter who would not be mothered or taught the way she should go. Lavinia Pringle herself was contentedly conscious that she had never done anything that could be described as peculiar, had never stepped off the straight path of convention marked out by her parents before her.

When the weather was fine she drove out of an after-

noon in the open carriage. Sometimes she visited county neighbours, for she was punctilious about calls and their return, and surprised if other people were not the same. More often she went to see those nearer neighbours who used all to be her tenants. She did not understand Land Acts. That was business for men. The human relation, which was what she did understand, remained unchanged. It was still her business to see after these people when they were ill; to reprove their failings, and demoralise their children with wholesome goodies.

To-day, as it rained, she settled down comfortably to enjoy a book by the fire. But she found herself thinking instead—worrying.

There had been more changes this last year than in all the years since she had lost her parents. She had never before needed to worry over the management of her large estate. Between dear old Mr. Henry in Kilcashel, and poor Mr. Brown, the agent, everything had been rightly done without any trouble to her. But now she had lost both these good friends and able ministers. Young Mr. Henry, the present lawyer, no doubt did his best. But he was not his father, nor could he be expected to do all Mr. Brown's work as well as his own. And his ideas about a person to replace Mr. Brown were really beyond the beyonds, and had driven her to the extremity of acting for herself.

Of course what she had done was only to ask the help of another man—the head of her family. For as such she regarded the son of the only daughter of the elder branch.

"By all I have ever heard of Pavington," she told herself, "he is like his father, and I am quite sure he is a person to depend on. But I wonder he has not answered my letter. It will soon be a week since I wrote."

She longed for the affair to be settled. The present state of things was so very uncomfortable, and she quite

dreaded the interviews with the offended Mr. Henry, so frequently necessary during the interregnum. So much did she dislike them that she could not repress an "Oh my!" of dismay when, presently, Hayden the butler announced that Mr. Henry was there.

"What a dreadful wet day for him to come out," she said to cover her lapse from proper self-command.

"He came in the covered motor, ma'am," said Hayden, with a respectfully subdued snort.

"I am glad to hear it," said Miss Pringle. She knew it was unreasonable in her household to take such exception to the attorney's secondhand Ford.

She saw her man of business in the library. He was a lean, pallid and apologetic man, with a red nose, innocently caused by a bad digestion, but which did not add to his personal attractiveness. His manners knew no mean between deprecation and domineering.

"It's a simple little matter," he said soothingly. But she knew that was only a formula. He did not really think it a simple little matter at all that a tenant should hold a receipt, made out by Miss Pringle herself, for arrears of rent paid up in full to a date not specified, when there was no trace whatever of this indefinite sum in any of the books at the office.

"It was paid," she assured him. "I know that, though I could not be certain when. Of course it was since poor Mr. Brown's being taken ill, for I never had to do with such a thing before."

"It's too bad to trouble you, Miss Pringle, but if you wouldn't mind looking up your bank-book. Whatever payment was made must have gone into your estate account."

"I will get the bank-book if you like. But I see no reason to suppose that the rent will appear there. I rather think I paid the sustentation fund with the money, and I remember now that part he made up with a barrel of potatoes."

Mr. Henry gave a groan of irritation.

"But what do you have that account for, Miss Pringle, if it's not for everything to go into it and everything come out?"

She sighed in bewilderment.

"I cannot understand the advantage of that, and it sounds most troublesome. Did you expect me to lodge the potatoes? I preferred to eat them."

It tried the attorney that he never could be sure how far the lady was serious.

"Well, Miss Pringle, there need have been none of this if you would only have listened to me at the beginning. With a first-rate man like Andrew Mackesey there ready to step into the agency. As to local connections, it's twenty years he's been in America, and there's a good deal of water run under the bridge in that time."

Miss Pringle drew herself up.

"I think," she said, "you would find Mackesey himself the first to recognise that the position for him would be impossible. Besides, it would not be fair to give what I can afford to make a good post to a man who is extremely well off already."

"Oh, of course, if you want to make a charitable institution of your place——" Henry burst out, aggravated beyond endurance, and fell silent again in confusion under the lady's eye.

"I can see," she went on, ignoring his comment, "that it would be trying for you, now, to arrange the appointment of anyone else. And I have the greatest regard for Mackesey, and would not for a moment have it thought I have any objection to him personally. That is why I have put the appointment in my cousin's hands —because it will be pleasanter for us all. I hope very soon to hear that he is sending over a responsible, capable person who will relieve you of all these complications."

The lawyer cleared his throat in an aggrieved manner and fidgetted with the pile of books he had brought

from the office. He could not help it if complications arose between the hopeless old lady herself and the doddering fool she kept on at the farm instead of a proper steward. Now she put on an outsider over his head to choose her agent. The thought of a swanking, up-to-date Englishman taking over the office and finding the mess it was in through no fault of his—Henry's—was bitter.

"Now, Mr. Henry, there is a thing I must ask you to explain to me."

Good Lord, when she could not understand the plainest thing!

The farm balance, which he had made up for last year, showed an increase on the profit side over the year before, whereas Miss Pringle knew there was less money in the bank.

"But the increase is on your stock-valuation, don't you see?"

"But you said yourself everything should go into the bank?"

"But this is your assets, the increase in the value of your *assets*. They must appear in the farm account, or how would you know how you stand?"

"Do you mean—things like the barrel of potatoes that can't go into the bank?"

"Ach, not at all! That's nothing to do with this. Let me show you."

He traced a mazy course among the figures with a black finger-nail that kept pace with his own understanding. Miss Pringle had not learnt business terminology when she studied French and Italian, and she had never been strong on arithmetic. She remained unenlightened and annoyed.

"You can leave the books with me, and I will go into things with Murphy and try to get you the information you want. I need not keep you any longer now."

She went back to the drawing-room with her heart

full of the fervent wish that she might hear from Pavington to-morrow.

It was late and dark when sounds reached her of the front door being unbarred, and Hayden brought in a note on a salver.

"There's a Mr. Russell has came, ma'am."

It is to be feared that Hayden was not the perfect butler. His manner expressed as much surprise and agitation at the arrival of a stranger with a suitcase at this hour as Miss Pringle felt herself. She opened the note.

"My goodness!" she murmured. "The new agent."

"Beg your pardon, ma'am," said Hayden sharply.

"Will you show Mr. Russell into the library?"

"The fire is gone out in the library, ma'am."

"Oh, very well, you must show him in here."

What an hour to arrive! What could be done about opening the agent's house? He must just drive back to the hotel at Kilcashel.

Then the new agent appeared. It was Mr. Russell's misfortune that he looked full five years younger than his real age, which was actually twenty-one, as he appeared at that moment with a flushed face wet with rain, and all the self-confidence gone out of him. He did not realise the reason for the complete dumb-founderment in which Miss Pringle stood regarding the responsible person chosen for her by her cousin. He thought he must look the deceiver that he was.

"You are dreadfully wet," said Miss Pringle at last.

"I'm awfully sorry for turning up like this, so late," he apologised in dire confusion. "I didn't think it was so far, and I lost my way. I am awfully sorry."

The whole weight of the irregularity of his proceedings had descended on him on the threshold of Ardreenan.

"But how did you come?"

"Oh, I walked."

"Good gracious!" said Miss Pringle. "And you can't have had any tea."

Jack had, in fact, had very little sustenance throughout his journey, since he was economising to the last penny. His ravening hunger, after the tramp in the dark and rain, was not encouraging to the spirit of adventure. The more compassionate grew Miss Pringle's voice, the deeper grew his consciousness of guilt.

"Lord Pavington has sent you——" she began uncertainly.

"I came to apply for the post," he answered, without meeting her kind eyes.

"You—you have qualifications——?"

He had made out an excellent case for himself beforehand. But he could not now think of any qualifications that he had for anything but a lunatic asylum.

"I can drive a motor all right," was the only thing that occurred to him that he could say with truth.

"But I do not keep motors." Miss Pringle looked from Pavington's letter to the bearer, from the boy to the letter, and strove for presence of mind.

"I've had four years' business experience," he was saying desperately.

"When?" she asked. Her mind was blank. She could not think of anything at all to do with a creature like this, except that it should be fed.

"It is time to get ready for dinner," she said, and rose.

"I'll be getting back to the village," said Jack, with a rueful thought of the long, wet roads.

"To where? Kilcashel? Certainly not." Miss Pringle spoke with authority, accustomed to command in her own house. "You are stopping here for the night, and you must really go now and get into something dry."

She had already rung for Hayden, and she bade him

show Mr. Russell to the Blue Room, and see that he had all he wanted.

For herself, she was stunned and could not realise the situation. It was enough to begin with that she must arrange for an adequate meal, and for the proper airing of the Blue Room bed. It meant a domestic convulsion, at Ardreenan, to accomplish such things without notice. But she met less opposition than she had expected. Hayden, indeed, waylaid her in the hall.

"Will I bring coffee to the library, ma'am? The young gentleman will be apt to want to smoke. There's the box of cigarettes we got the time you had Major Pringle-Deans here."

"That was a long time ago," Miss Pringle said, perturbed. "Are they things that keep? Do you think, Hayden, they'd be sure to be quite wholesome? As far as tobacco ever is."

"I think, ma'am, he may prefer his own brand. But we'd want to have something to offer, like."

Hayden was aware of the smoke with which the young gentleman was at that moment soothing his feelings in the Blue Room. Had he not closed the passage door, lest the mistress should get the smell?

The hastily organised dinner was sumptuous and solid. Miss Pringle, with all her old-fashioned refinement, kept an unregenerate liking for people who enjoyed their food. Her heart warmed to young Mr. Russell. He, as the meal progressed, grew able to appreciate the glossy tablecloth, and bright glass and silver. He was aware of the general effect of his hostess' satin and old lace under the rose-shaded candles, and the fire-glow dancing over well-polished mahogany—the whole comfortable feeling of wealth and leisure and fine taste, and the contrast of it with his late surroundings.

As he revived, Miss Pringle began to ask tentative questions, seeking after some explanation of her cousin's

choice. Of Pavington, Mr. Russell seemed to have nothing at all to say. But he was not naturally reticent as to his private affairs, and Miss Lavinia was no fool. She learnt a great deal more than he ever thought of telling. She perceived the lack of love in his tone when he spoke of the bank, and gathered hints of the financial straits at home. Was this, then, the explanation? That Pavington had thought of the boy and not of her? Comprehensible, perhaps, but it was not fair. She could not, as Mr. Henry said, make a charity of her estate. He was a nice boy, but he could know nothing.

Nothing particular could be said with Hayden in attendance. But no sooner were they alone in the library than full enlightenment came.

"Miss Pringle," said Jack, scarlet-faced. "I must tell you. You were asking me about Lord Pavington. I never spoke to him in my life. He doesn't know I exist. He never gave me that chit. I found it."

"Found—what?"

"That paper. And your letter to Lord Pavington. In a waiting-room—at a station on the way to Crewe—in an envelope."

He did not feel strong enough to tell her how the envelope was addressed. It was rather much to ask her to believe of the cousin she seemed to think so much of. And if she should believe it, it would be letting down a neighbour rather far.

"I tried to get on to Lord Pavington about it at once," he struggled on. "They said he'd gone abroad, and couldn't attend to anything. I didn't quite know what to do about it next, and then—and then——" There was a long, shamefaced and expressive pause. "I thought I'd have a shot myself."

Miss Pringle looked straight before her, thinking. She was relieved, inexpressibly, of her doubt concerning Pavington. She ought to be angry with the boy, but she could only be distressed.

"It was sort of—partly for the fun of the thing, you

know," said Jack. "I didn't think about plunging in on you like this. I expect I was quite mad."

"I'm afraid I expected someone with much more experience."

"Oh, rather. Of course. And I've my own job to go back to, you know."

"In the bank?"

"In the bank."

CHAPTER V

"CE N'EST QUE L'IMPREVU——"

JACK had foreseen his fate from the moment of arrival at Ardreenan. It was no unexpected blow. But all the same, reality was blank.

Miss Pringle saw the dejection in his attitude, and grew indignant at the carelessness that had made possible all this disappointment. Pavington's secretary must be to blame, of course. She was very sure her cousin himself would not leave important letters lying about in railway stations. She was disappointed enough for herself. Pavington was off abroad, and whatever arrangements he had been making for her had miscarried. She could hope for no solution of her problem now till he came back; and, according to Mr. Russell, the time of his return was quite uncertain. Meanwhile, she was sure that the estate was doing badly, and she could not make out why. When she asked Murphy, the steward, he defended himself against charges of embezzlement which no one had thought of bringing against him. When she made inquiries of Mr. Henry, he talked of assets and valuation. And the one was as illuminating as the other.

The uncomfortable silence which had fallen between her and the impostor was broken by the arrival of Murphy to give evidence on the question of rents. She had him in to the library as usual. Had she been less anxious about his susceptibilities, or herself more clearly understood what it was that she was trying to find out, the interview might have been more profitable. As it was, her delicate queries provoked an avalanche

of irrelevant history, subtly blent with unsolicited testimony of an unfavourable nature to Mr. Henry's character and abilities.

Jack could not help hearing all that went on, since his hostess would not let him leave the room and the fire on Murphy's entrance. The truth was that she did not recognise that Mr. Russell was old enough to count as a third person. When the steward had gone, she sat down wearily and passed a hand over her forehead.

"After all that discussion," she confided to her visitor, "the only solid fact I have evolved is that Cooper's Dip is the thing to apply if you cut your hand with a hay-knife. I am afraid that information will not be very useful to my man of business, who is trying to straighten out the estate books."

Mr. Russell wriggled in his chair. He had made out enough to know that he could unravel some of the confusion. But could he butt in in the circumstances?

"If it was just a matter of figures," he ventured at last, "perhaps I could work it out while I'm here? If you'd let me have the data?"

Miss Pringle shook her head sadly.

"I'm sure I would with pleasure. But the thing is that there are not any data."

Jack preferred a suggestion that, as the trouble seemed to be the steward having kept such rents as came through his hands towards paying the wages——

"I told him to," owned Miss Pringle.

—Without making any note of their amount, so that it was not clear which tenants had paid up in full—it would throw some light on the case if one were to subtract the amount of the cheque given for expenses for each week in question from what he had actually spent. Murphy had remembered all the dates perfectly.

Miss Pringle was profoundly impressed. She looked at Mr. Russell, who was dangling the corner of a clean

pocket handkerchief to amuse the cat, regardless of claws. How did such heedless creatures ever have a whole rag on their backs when they were away from their mothers! But might he possibly know more than he looked as if he could?

She entrusted to him, with her blessing, the whole pile of account-books, and was further impressed when he produced a neatly written statement of the first result of his researches—the kind of thing, she was sure, that would appeal to Mr. Henry.

Jack returned to the estate-books. They interested him more than any of the other literature provided for his delectation, and also it made him feel better to have something useful to do as amends for his intrusion. Miss Pringle studied him as he sat, absorbed, with the cat spread over his knee.

He was a very nice boy.

" The bank can't want you back before Monday, Mr. Russell. You can stay at least till Sunday, and see something of the country while you are over? "

" Oh, but I say," said Jack. " I should think you wouldn't want to see any more of me! Anyone else would have hoofed me out straight, or sent for the police."

Miss Pringle ignored the protest.

" Now you've done enough at those old books for to-night," she said.

At her command, he left them, concentrated the cat's overflowing ends, and swung round from the table to the fire.

" What do you do in the evenings at home? " she asked, at a loss how to entertain this species of young barbarian.

Jack gazed round the formal, orderly room, wondering which of the occupations prevalent among six brothers and sisters and a youthful mother would be most agreeable to his hostess.

" What do you do here? " he asked politely.

"I play patience. And I read a good deal. Do you like reading?" She kept amused eyes on his face.

"Not frightfully much. The fact is, at home, when the children and the dogs are there, one doesn't seem to do anything but just make a row. And when they're got rid of to bed, one's thankful for a chance of a little rational conversation."

"I see."

Miss Pringle took up her knitting, and settled herself comfortably and encouragingly in her chair. Mr. Russell conversed without effort for the rest of the evening. He found the time pass very pleasantly, and so did Miss Pringle. By bed-time there were not many of his life-experiences which had not been described to her, and they parted for the night on terms of established friendship.

Jack groaned at sight of the glowing fire in his room upstairs. How would Mrs. Jones' select board-residence feel after this? Old Lanktree came to the door, commissioned to see if he had blankets enough on his bed, and to point out the tin of biscuits on the chimney-piece, in case he should be hungry in the night. And Jack groaned more deeply as he settled himself with a cigarette in the big armchair before the fire, and picked off, out of ingrained thrift, half the coal that Lanktree had shovelled on. He had brought the pile of books up with him. He was desperately sleepy, but it had occurred to him that he might make an abstract that would show Miss Pringle roughly how she stood.

"Kind of books that Noah kept in the Ark, where he'd time on his hands," he commented profanely on Mr. Brown's private system, which the late agent, overtaken by sudden illness, had left unexplained in all its complexity.

Jack woke in the morning to the sound of all sounds the most cheerful and prosperous, the scrish-rish of

gravel being raked under his window. From the window, when he got up, he watched travelling beams of sunshine draw over field and wood. A cart with an opulent load of straw came trundling up from the farmstead, whose white walls gleamed behind its screen of budding trees. A boy, ringing a fat carriage-horse sedately on the grass, stood for a light-hearted word with the carter, while the cart-mare took her own way under the stable arch.

Through a gap in the trees a brow of land showed, chequered with tawny lea and plummy bloom of fresh plough. There were fringes of larch plantation which, Jack could see from where he was, were badly in need of thinning. A dark and a grey horse, harrowing, and a white-nosed bay with the roller, passed in slow procession across the gap. The voices of the men floated back, as they called to their wise teams turning on the headlands. And Jack's heart failed him, so that he could not look any more, since his own fate was to go back to the bank on Monday, and probably every Monday for all the rest of his life. However, the less thought of that the better, as it couldn't be helped, and he still had a day and a half here, and a whole new country to see.

It was also a satisfaction that he had achieved a rough abstract of the Ardreenan accounts, which when he showed it to Miss Pringle after breakfast, surprised and pleased her beyond his hopes; and which she understood perfectly as he expounded it.

It was no trouble to Jack to have patience and go on explaining till he was understood. He was not afflicted, like Henry, with an irritable temper. He did not need, like Henry, to make heroic efforts to keep himself in hand. Yet, so unfair is human judgment, that for behaving as it was his nature to, Miss Pringle gave him all the credit for courtesy and kindness that should have been the meed of the sorely tried attorney.

She had arranged for the least fat of the horses to

be at the young man's disposition, to ride or drive in Murphy's trap wherever his fancy inclined. But his immediate desire was to get details out of Murphy and finish the job with the books. She thought it wise to go with him herself, by the field path to the farm, and she found herself enjoying this departure from the normal morning routine.

Old Murphy, trained under her father, might not be highly educated, but he was an excellent practical farmer. She could take pride in her clean fields and flourishing stock. And this guest was an eminently appreciative person to show them to, interested in everything. Many points of local practice that he inquired into were beyond the scope of her knowledge, and had to be referred to Murphy, when they found him loading manure from a noble heap.

She need not have been anxious as to Murphy's reception of Mr. Russell and his questions. Mr. Russell had a kindred soul for manure heaps, and was easily accepted as a fit person to be in the mistress' counsels. Murphy even fetched out and committed to the visitor's hands, unasked, his own sacred day-book, kept with great labour and inaccuracy now that there was no Mr. Brown to check him.

His confidence had its reward. Miss Pringle and the young gentleman were not long gone by the back way to the fields when Mr. Henry's motor came up the lane from the road.

"I want that book of yours," said Henry, without preface or politeness.

"Want'll be your master, then," thought Murphy. He was just hurrying to make up for the time wasted on the gentlefolk. To have to waste more of a fine, dry morning on a scut of a 'tarney out of the town was too much for farmer's flesh and blood. If the book had been in the house, he knew well it would have been his place to give it up. But since it was in the strange young gentleman's pocket, he could indulge his feelings.

" I'll give no book, mister," he said, " without Miss Pringle's orders."

" What's that? " snapped Henry. " That's no way to speak, Murphy, and you know it."

" So—far—as I know," said the steward with slow emphasis, " Miss Pringle owns this place, and not you —you dirty, impudent pup, you! " he concluded under his breath. But what he said aloud carried a weight of insult, a libellous insinuation of malpractice, such as a strictly honest man like Henry could not be expected to stand.

" Will you give me that book here? " he menaced, a vow of vengeance in every accent of his voice.

The steward's face was set in obstinacy and a deep, grim humour.

" I will not," he said.

Miss Pringle went upstairs to change after her walk.

" Is the young gentleman going to-morrow, ma'am?" asked Lanktree, attending her.

The question annoyed Miss Pringle, and she objected to the shoes produced for her wear instead of answering. The thought of that boy going back to a city was hateful.

" I declare to mankind ! " said Lanktree, diving after other shoes under the dressing-table's frilly muslin petticoat, " the house'll be lonely after him. It'll be the very same as if it was a corpse was after carrying out, when he's gone."

Lanktree was right. It was good to have something young about the place. Miss Pringle, for her part, knew quite well that she wanted to keep the boy more than she had ever in her life before wanted an unreasonable thing. But she need not confess her weakness. She went down instead to see Mr. Henry, whose car was at the door.

She found him fuming. His wrath boiled over in a sputtering flood, unchecked for once by her presence—

a fine, portly presence—very upright at the other side of the table. That old man at the farm was impossible. No one could do with him. An archangel would not put up with what he, Henry, had borne for her sake in trying to contend with him. He was a fool and doting; he was old in sin; he couldn't keep a civil tongue in his head—an ignorant fellow.

Miss Pringle knew better than to argue with an angry man. She heard Henry out, her own temper growing hot and hotter at each fresh attack on her faithful friend and servant.

"You did not understand," she said, when she had arrived at the immediate cause of offence. "He could not give you that book because he did not have it."

"Have it or not, he defied me," stormed Henry. "This is the end of it, Miss Pringle. It's him or me. I'll not stand more of it, and either he goes——"

"If he was in any way rude to you, it was very wrong, and I will speak to him. But I would as soon leave Ardreenan myself as part with Murphy!"

Henry, with a gesture, threw down the papers he was carrying and took up his hat. He was, of course, acting. Nothing in the world would suit him less than to cut his connection with Ardreenan. He reckoned to strengthen his position there by levering out an enemy and putting in some adherent of his own. But fury made him play his part with great conviction. Miss Pringle shrewdly suspected bluff, but she could not be sure, and could not afford to count on her suspicion. She was faced with crisis.

She did not hesitate to cope with it. A purpose sprang to light in the emergency, which had been forming below the surface of her consciousness.

"If you will now listen to me, Mr. Henry"—she recalled him to attention—"I can reassure you. There will be no further need for you to have to do with Murphy, or the tenants, or any of Mr. Brown's work. Indeed, you need not have been troubled with

it so long if you had exerted yourself to find a proper person to succeed Mr. Brown, instead of urging what was impossible. As it is, however—my agent is appointed."

Miss Pringle had one moment of pure pleasure, seeing Henry's disgruntlement. Then, as she swept out of the room, misgivings assailed her. What if the boy should now decline to stay? She could only offer to have him as a stop-gap, only till Pavington returned and provided someone more suitable. The Scotch drop in her heredity prompted, too, that she could not give full pay to one too inexperienced to be worth it. It would just be an opening to the kind of work he wanted, and Pavington's influence would get him some post where he could learn the business properly.

So she revolved, waiting in the drawing-room, till Jack appeared in response to an imperative summons.

" Mr. Russell, I have a proposition to make to you." Trying to balance between over-anxiety and a hypocritical detachment, Miss Pringle outlined her scheme. " On these conditions, would you care to stay? "

" To stay? " With a wild effort Jack repressed the expression of his feelings within the limits of drawing-room manners.

" Would you? " Miss Pringle repeated, not understanding.

" Ra-ther," said Jack, and found no more to say.

Miss Pringle, with acute annoyance, felt the sting of rising tears.

" Very well," she said primly. " That is settled, then. Now, as it happens that Mr. Henry is here, I had better introduce you. He will give you the key of the office and explain things."

Jack followed her to the library door. There she turned with an air of some embarrassment.

" It is not necessary—in fact I would rather you did not mention anything about your relations, or rather lack of relations, with my cousin Pavington."

" Oh, right-O," he promised.

What a fine fool Mr. Henry would think she had made of herself if he knew, she reflected. Lavinia Pringle cherished her dignity dearly. It was the due compensation for declining years, and she had ceased to ask more of life than its perfect maintenance. She had never thought of asking very much of life, and who asks little generally gets less.

Jack was too much fuddled with joy to take in any clear impression of Mr. Henry, except that he was looking at Lord Pavington's chit on the table where Miss Pringle had forgotten it. But Henry received a vivid impression of Mr. Russell, and it momentarily bereft him of the use of his tongue. In his heart he said: " Poor lady! Here's what comes of doing things off her own bat."

He was not without comfort in his horror. Even Miss Pringle must soon see now how much use her lords and her cousins were. Then perhaps she would think more of him, her official adviser. This green colt would soon come to a smash. He would not last long. And when he ended in disaster, how sweet would be his—Henry's—triumph, how glorious his vindication! With an inward smacking of the lips the lawyer looked forward to the hour of Mr. Russell's certain fall.

CHAPTER VI

THE SQUARE HOLE

MONDAY morning dawned gloriously, and Jack awoke to know himself no longer a clerk with a stool awaiting him. He belonged instead to the real, productive world that lay outside, frost-silvered and sparkling in the early sunshine.

In Mrs. Jones' boarding-house the boarders would be bolting their breakfast—by gaslight as likely as not. Jack, in imagination, smelt the breakfast, and also the ghost of last night's dinner haunting the dining-room and narrow hall. Downstairs, while he wondered what Mrs. Jones would say to the profusion on Miss Pringle's table—she measured his normal capacity by his first starvation—his house-mates of last week would be running for their trains and trams. They would swell the tide of business men and girls setting citywards under a murky sky, to be swallowed by a thousand dismal doors. From his heart he pitied them. At the same immutable hour their offices would swallow them, day after day without respite or hope, year after year, till they must go mad. Unless, of course, they liked being swallowed, and were content to have it happen regularly. Jonah may have found it snug quarters inside the whale. But Jack had had no zest in life in the stuffy interior of his whale—the bank; and though he had done his best to earn his screw, he was sure the whale equally had found him indigestible. But, then, he was immensely obliged to it for spewing him out without notice, and liked to think it shared the

rapture he felt at their parting. He would have had all creation happy this Monday morning.

All Sunday had passed in the numb bliss of knowing a thing had happened that was too big to believe in all at once. Only now he realised what had come to pass. Never in all his life had he felt, nor should he feel again, quite the same thrill, the same ecstatic sense of miracle. It was when he went out to take up his duties that it came upon him in full force. With the estate-office key in his pocket, and a long list of outdoor things to attend to, he was scudding down the avenue on a bicycle borrowed for him from the kitchen-maid by the resourceful Hayden. It rattled and squeaked somewhat, and the clangour of his coming sent a knot of long-tailed colts off, galloping wildly, and Jack shouted after them in the wild joy of his heart.

There was nothing to damp him in his reception by Murphy and the men. All were so agreeable and helpful that an older man would have wondered, and thought it too good to be true. Jack did not guess that he owed this smooth going to Mr. Henry, whose unpopularity was such that the whole staff was determined to uphold the new agent against him at all costs. But the office sobered him with a sense of his responsibilities. He was here, and he must make good. After a strenuous day he returned to Ardreenan sincerely thankful for not yet having come a mucker, and not more pleased with himself than was reasonable.

On the table in his room, in an envelope addressed in Miss Pringle's delicate hand, was a cheque for two hundred pounds, a half-year's salary in advance. Jack sat a long time looking at it. Then he wrote to his family.

There was business to do in the village to-morrow, and he could open an account at the bank there, and enclose a cheque for a hundred pounds in his letter. Some sensation at home! They did not even know

where he was. That would pay off all the bills and float things for quite a while. Then he must get himself a decent suit of tweeds to keep up his position, and a secondhand push-bike. Or he might pick up the scrap remains of a motor-bike cheap, and put them together. Expenses generally would not be much, since Miss Pringle had said she had other views for the agent's house, and he must live at Ardreenan. He ought to have a solid chunk left to invest against the day when Pavington, the smug old hypocrite, came back and hoofed him out.

His head was full of these matters on the morrow, and he saw no storm-cloud rise on his fair horizon when a prepossessing young man waylaid him to apply for a certain empty cottage on the estate. He consulted the steward later as to the desirability of this Cassidy as a tenant, and Murphy said nothing against Cassidy. He threw out his hand towards the rocky ridge of Ardreenan Hill.

"Her beyond," he said. "They turned her back from the gate-lodge a Thursday, and the mistress said it shouldn't happen again. Do you take me?"

Seeing that the new agent had not taken him, he explained further.

"Them Cassidys. The mother had a brother, and he's dead. He was married to that woman her husband took out of the workhouse on account of her being the father's sister—if you take me now?" A child, he thought, should be able to follow the genealogical connection between the Cassidys and Andy Mack's wife at the back of the Hill—that Mrs. O'Mackesey who had been stopped driving through the avenues, and whose feelings Miss Pringle particularly wished not to hurt again.

Finding Mr. Russell still impervious to the light of his elucidations, he gave it up in despair, and Jack could get nothing more obviously relevant out of him. But when he reported the affair and Murphy's mystical

comments to Miss Pringle, it was clear to her that the old man thought ill of the applicant, but feared offence to the Mackeseys if he were refused. The thing worried her; and Jack did not see that she need worry about anything when he was there in charge.

"Leave it all to me," he said. "I'll make inquiries, and see that it's all O.K."

She smiled as she watched him go out, with the little self-confident lift of the head that was so becoming. But she felt anxious through the day. He was plunging light-heartedly into things that were deep and difficult. That way lay trouble, and she did not want her experiment to get into trouble.

Meanwhile, Jack was marking trees in the further plantation, climbing banks and swinging his hatchet with sheer animal enjoyment of activity. He did not know that his every move was watched from the lane below by knowledgeable eyes, which noted that he worked with discretion as well as energy. Only when he came out at the end of a strip of wood did he become aware of a native in good clothes, smoking peacefully on the back of a three-cornered chestnut mare.

The native was of a type on which Murphy would have commented that "them old mountainy ones do be damn' cute"—a wiry man with the features of an aristocrat and a steady habit of expectoration. He accosted Mr. Russell respectfully by name.

"I've a nice little lump of a mare here." He patted the somnolent chestnut. "I heard you were looking for a hunter."

Jack had no intention of buying a horse, and said so bluntly. But the sporting imputation flattered him, and predisposed him in the stranger's favour. Possibly Mr. Andrew Mackesey—known to friends and enemies as Andy Mack—had calculated this result. Certainly he was not the man to part with the cleverest jumper in the hunt before the end of the season. It is also possible that for pure love of art he gave his delicate rendering

of the way of a man with a horse to sell—an art thrown away on the young barbarian before him.

"It's seldom you meet an honest horse," he observed, with the perfect touch of lingering pity for a fellow-creature missing the chance of a lifetime. "But she wouldn't be everyone's ride, right enough. You'd want *to* ride. I thought I'd show her to you. The dam won the Derby."

Jack cast a quizzical look over the animal, not knowing that every saleable horse in the county would prove of the same descent.

Andy, having meanwhile taken his own observations, dropped his mask with a jerk of the head towards the far-away chimneys of Ardreenan.

"How's the mistress?"

"Oh, very well."

"That's a lady," Mackesey declared with deep conviction. "It isn't growing on every bush you'll find the likes of her."

Jack assented with seemly restraint. But the other had a code of manners of his own, and could understand that on the subject of Miss Pringle they were cordially at one.

For as long, at least, as there had been Pringles at Ardreenan, there had been Mackeseys, or MacAseys, on a mountainy small-holding at the back of Ardreenan Hill; and for so long there had been friendship between the two houses. The Pringles were a careful race, who had never dissipated their wealth in any form of riotous living, and never found it difficult to be just landlords and generous friends. The Mackeseys, by intelligence, hard work and straight dealing, had lived decently on their lean acres, and multiplied till their family connections spread round Ardreenan like a net.

It was a net to entangle hopelessly the feet of any member of the clan—no matter how long or how prosperous his sojourn in the New World—who should

set up to be the Pringles' agent. Andy Mack knew this quite as well as did Miss Pringle. He understood his rejection, and what can be understood can be forgiven. He, no more than any other human man, would have objected to an extra six hundred a year. But love of the soil had brought him back from America to inherit the scrap of land behind the hill. He had built a grand new house there for a smart new wife; and it was really of more vital interest to add a bit here and there to his own domain than to intrigue with Henry for the management of larger property owned by someone else. Besides, no courteously-inflicted injury could kill an hereditary friendship. Had not the "old master" lent him capital at a crucial point of his career? Did not he keep warm in his inmost heart the memory of a certain hot camomile-bag, administered by Miss Lavinia's own hands when she was a beautiful young lady and he an urchin raging with the toothache?

In fine, Andy had come out of his way on purpose to establish relations with his supplanter, so as to see what that young one was doing with Miss Pringle's property.

They went sociably down the cart-track, Jack on the kitchenmaid's bicycle. They were of different classes, creeds and nationalities, but each had a civilisation that went down to the marrow of his bones, and they were at ease with each other as neither could be with Henry, that unfinished product of evolution, who had been the unwitting means of bringing them together.

The horseman presently pulled up with dramatic suddenness. Whereat Jack, who had no brake that worked, upset in a rut.

"I'll tell you what," said Andy, with portentous mystery. "This is a place where you want to go very cautious!"

Something clandestine about the man had already puzzled Jack. He avoided telling his name or where

he lived. He gave the most ordinary local information under seal of deepest confidence.

Andy Mack, in fact, found himself in a delicate position. It was as much as his domestic life was worth to let any rumour of this traffic with the enemy reach his wife. He would not like Miss Pringle to know that he was watching her interests, lest it should annoy her to be beholden for any little thing to the man she had turned down. And, further to complicate the case, he rather liked the enemy.

"There's parties," he said, "that wouldn't be sorry to see some other parties put their foot in it, and it isn't to yourself they'd go to complain."

A nod was as good as a wink to a blind horse. Mr. Russell looked sympathetic but quite blank, and Andy did not see his way to give a more explicit warning against his particular friend, Mr. Henry. They had come to the parting of their ways—to the point, that is, beyond which Mrs. Mackesey might see them from her parlour window. He bent down and prodded his companion in the shoulder.

"Well now, if those Cassidy ones get after you for the house beyond, don't let them in on it for your life."

"Why?" Jack was startled. "We're in treaty with them. I've just got a very good account of them from their present landlord."

"You would!" said Andy briefly; and added in sinister explanation: "Unless he'd a mind to keep them for himself."

"What's wrong with them?"

The Irishman smiled at the crude directness of the question. A rigid code forbade his answering that his neighbours were thieves, schemers and profoundly disreputable. He bent down again to whisper: "I'd a right to know, anyway. They're cousins of my own."

"Well, thanks for the hint," said Jack. "Of course I must inquire further, but there's nothing settled, and if——"

His breeding kept Mackesey unmoved under the shock of a staggering insult. In a moment he laughed outright, a dry crow of laughter that held an intensity of amusement. Had one of his peers refused thus blatantly to take his word for a thing without further inquiries he could never have walked on the same side of the road with that man again, unless it were for the purpose of kicking the gizzard out of him. Naturally one made inquiries, only one did not let on. But this boy was a gentleman and knew no better, and Andy Mack had seen the world. So he took no offence. He informed Mr. Russell where he could inquire and learn the truth, the whole truth and a good deal more; told him of other likely applicants who were decent people; and suggested that he could get out of the Cassidys by saying that Miss Pringle had promised the house to someone else without letting him know.

" If they don't turn out to be right sort of tenants, that's all about it," said Jack.

Andy accorded a measure of respect to the form of civilisation which enabled a person to speak and act with this direct simplicity. Maybe Miss Pringle wasn't as innocent as some parties thought when she took on this agent.

Jack, discovering that he would be late for lunch, disappeared like a streak down the precipitous hill.

" It'd be a pity he'd break his neck," the elder man remarked after him tolerantly. " He'll surely liven up the old place, and it's time," he thought, looking across the woods at the roof of Ardreenan House. He had come home after the swiftly-flying, active years in America, still thinking of Miss Lavinia as a beautiful young lady. When he saw her again she had the settled ways of age, and talked of old times like one with all her life behind her. Yet she wasn't ten years older than himself, and he had no notion of being a spent man in ten years time, or twenty.

" It's a dirty lonely old place," he concluded. " She

had a right to have got herself a comrade of *some* sort."

From the high ridge he cast a disparaging eye over three counties, where no one of the more or less poverty-stricken gentry places, marked by dark blurs of trees, was qualified in his eyes for matrimonial alliance with Ardreenan.

PART II

MR. WEST

CHAPTER VII

"BEHOLD HOW GREAT A MATTER A LITTLE FIRE KINDLETH!"

IT took Miss Pringle a week to break her agent of the habit of speaking of Kilcashel as 'the village.' He regarded that centre of civilisation with casual pity as the last place on earth. And perhaps the general aspect of the town, huddled on the windy side of its bleak hill, was not calculated to impress a stranger. Its fringes of poor houses caught the sun happily enough on their shabby whitewash, and the blue-and-red carts, jingling in from the country, kept the business end of Main Street alive. The shops, besides, set out interesting selections of their wares on the pavement on fine days; and there was a scarlet petrol pump in front of Finn's garage.

But the residential end of the climbing street, above the cross where the road from Ardreenan ran in at right angles, could not borrow geniality from the brightest weather. The town-hall stood on the cross, and seemed to cast a blight—as well it might—and beyond it nothing stirred but dirty papers whirling in eddies of the east wind. Nothing enlivened the eaveless, drab-plastered houses except their water-pipes, and a dying aspidistra here and there in front of the lace curtains that shrouded all the windows, making a perpetual dusk within.

Jack Russell saw nought of all that went on behind those sad façades. Riding in on business, he thought lightly of the whole place as a dead-and-alive little hole, and draughty at that. Little he knew that

here, on the humming wheel of the social life of Upper Main Street, was spun the thread of fate that had drawn him to Ardreenan.

For in Upper Main Street lived Mrs. Henry, sour of temper and truculent. Mrs. Henry was childless, and able to devote all her time to quarrelling with her neighbours, which she did. Having estranged them all, she was reduced for company to Mrs. Andy Mack —Mrs. O'Mackesey—who had a young family and social aspirations, and would put up with anything to have the *entrée* of the lawyer's house.

The lawyer's wife had been married for her money, which gave her an undue sense of consequence. Mrs. O'Mackesey pandered to this with assiduity and zeal. Mrs. Henry, in due course, undertook to reward her faithful satellite by helping her to the goal of her ambitions, which was the Ardreenan agent's house, and the position in society which attached to it. Hence Mrs. Henry's husband's advocacy of Andy Mack for the agency; which advocacy drove Miss Pringle to write her letter to Pavington; which gave Pavington occasion to sign his recommendation and lose it at Brogsford; which loss resulted in Mr. Russell being able to patronise Kilcashel from the back of Murphy's cob, instead of fidgetting on a stool in a bank in the Black Country.

Kilcashel, of course, had nothing to do with the other thread that led Lord Pavington's fate to cross Jack Russell's at Brogsford. But, if it had nothing to do with Lord Pavington, it had at least plenty to say about Mr. Bernard West, who had lain unconscious in Miss Percival's little house near the railway for so many days after the accident on the line. It said he was a secret agent from the Communists in Russia, and that was why no belongings of his own inquired for him. It said at the same time that someone heard he was a bagman from the North, travelling in church candles. And the most accepted saying was that he

would turn out to be the film actor whom the evening papers mentioned as having disappeared some time ago on the shores of the Isle of Wight.

The doctor said comprehensively that West was not that class of a man, and that he would be able to give an account of himself in a week or so, if he were left alone meanwhile to recover naturally from a bad concussion.

" He's coming to, all right, but he's lost his memory," the doctor's wife reported in more detail to old Miss Twomey, whose house was the centre of gossip. " And not a thing about him to show where he comes from. There's his name on his passport, but they can't make out any address to communicate with his people, if he has any, and he hardly can, the poor fellow, or there'd have been someone come when they saw the accident on the papers."

" The creature, isn't it well he's where he'll be minded! " exclaimed soft-hearted Miss Twomey.

" Well, indeed, there's more than one blames the Doctor for taking Honor Percival at her word when she told him she'd have beds ready and to bring any bad cases there. But it's so much the nearest house, and she such a sensible girl, and that old Mary Reddy of hers as good as a trained nurse. Poor Mr. West wasn't in a state to be moved far, and the Doctor was anxious enough at first about Miss Fitzgerald that there might be some internal injury as well as the broken wrist. He was naturally only too thankful to take the two of them straight to Derry Lodge."

" Naturally, Mrs. Royce, dear. Who minds Mrs. Henry! And we all know what dear Miss Pringle is. Living so far away from everything, she wouldn't realise, like, what an emergency it all was. Then, with Mrs. Fitzgerald coming over as soon as she heard about Miss Patricia——"

The mystery surrounding West gave his name prominence in spite of the fact that the other person

injured in the derailment was no less than Miss Fitzgerald of Geraldstown. The Fitzgeralds were the great people of the county, and once had owned land far and wide. The hotel in Kilcashel was still the 'Fitzgerald Arms,' though it was ten miles to Geraldstown House, where the family lived in an ill-repaired pile of pseudo-Gothic at the end of a mile and a half of avenue.

Times were changed, and only continual traffic kept grass from growing over the avenue. A wing of the great house had been burnt in the bad times, save for which providence the Fitzgeralds could hardly have kept the rest of the roof over their heads. They possessed little now but their own souls. But with that they remained important in their neighbourhood.

"To think Miss Fitzgerald was only going two stations down the line to Castle Carey for the party!" Mrs. Royce marvelled at the tricks of chance. "And the one carriage that turned over to be the one that she was in. Though, as Colonel Fitzgerald said himself to the Doctor, wouldn't it have been worse if it was one of the thirds full of people."

"I hear," said Miss Twomey, who heard everything, "the stationmaster at Geraldstown West was raging it didn't happen the day before, when there was an inspector on the train, and he couldn't have put her in first on the third-class ticket. It certainly seemed like a fate it should be that one carriage."

The Geraldstown road ran northward from Kilcashel. South-east of the town, and a couple of miles out, stood Derry Lodge, where lived Miss Pringle's godchild, Honor Percival. Ardreenan was some seven miles to the west. The three places thus lay far apart, but were all in touch with the town, and the town was minutely informed about them all. Geraldstown, indeed, was almost out of range of observation. But Mrs. Henry's cook had a friend—a workman on the line by the name of Michael Farrelly—whose home

was at the Geraldstown gates. So the news of those parts was fully reported from the Henry kitchen.

Miss Pringle drove in to the town at regular intervals, paying calls all round lest there should be jealousy. Kilcashel had a deep regard for her, appreciating her kindness as well as her idiosyncrasies. With the county at large, it stood a little in awe of her cultivation and her stately ways, but took a pride in her as a local speciality. Where else, nowadays, would be found a lady who drove with a carriage and pair and thought motor traffic dangerous?

Kilcashel was proud of Honor Percival, too, though in a different sense. For it held it to be a credit to the neighbourhood that Honor lived as she did. She was left without near relations when her father died, and since then her godmother on the one hand, and a guardian on the other, had striven to root her out of Derry Lodge. They said she was too young to be there with only a servant, and, besides that, she could not afford it. But Honor was a tough and a thorny plant, and she was there still. She contended, with some reason, that if she and Mary Reddy could live there and look after her father, who had long been a helpless invalid, they could at least equally well live there and look after themselves.

As to being poor, poverty suited Honor, since it was an excuse for trade, and hers was a commercial soul. She dealt in fowls and eggs, in pigs and puppies. She sold the produce of her garden. She even attended auctions, buying miscellaneous objects cheap and privately retailing them at a profit. By these dealings she eked out her slender allowance, and in this found the savour of life.

It had been arranged, with certain secret financial assistance from Miss Pringle, for the guardian's daughter to live and run a chicken-farm with Honor. But the daughter had a temperament and Honor had a temper, and the arrangement did not last. Mrs. Percival,

who had died early, was Miss Pringle's one close friend; and Miss Pringle would at any time joyfully have adopted the motherless child as her own. But the father, and the child itself, had different views. Now, at nineteen, Honor could imagine no life for which she would exchange Derry Lodge and independence. And all Kilcashel, from Mr. Henry to the postman, watched over and abetted her.

The railway accident—occasioned by some flaw in a new engine's brake—and Miss Percival's action in turning Derry Lodge into a hospital, would have given Kilcashel enough to talk about for some time in any case. When to these thrills was added the appearance of Mr. Russell at Ardreenan, Miss Twomey was so much moved that she invited Mrs. Henry to a tea-party.

Mrs. Royce, Miss Johnson from the Rectory and the Jephsons of the bank were the first arrivals for the said reunion, and they all vied with their hostess and her niece, Miss Dora, in enthusiasm for Mr. Russell and glee over the miscarriage of Mrs. Henry's schemes.

"One in the eye for her and that awful Mrs. Mack," said Mrs. Jephson, who had the bitterest feud with the lawyer's wife.

"Father McKeon was saying Mrs. Mack's husband is the longest-headed man between this and Cork, and Miss Pringle would be lucky to get him. And that's very true. But isn't a nice young fellow like that in the house worth two of him to her?"

"Will he ever be able to hold out, though?" Mrs. Jephson wondered anxiously. "It'll be hard for the poor boy, with the Macks against him tooth and nail as well as the Henrys."

"That Andy Mack is a deep one," added the bank manager. "A dangerous man to have for an enemy."

"Miss Pringle would have to have him, no doubt, if she couldn't keep on Mr. Russell," said Miss Dora.

" Think of Mrs. Mack cocked up in the agent's house, expecting Miss Pringle to call on her ! "

" The first time Miss Pringle went to the old farm at the back of the hill to visit her," recounted Mrs. Jephson, " she went at three o'clock, and my brave Mrs. Mack landed up tea without a word ! The cheek of the woman ! "

" Is it a fact," asked the bank manager, who despised gossip in theory, " that she went to Ardreenan to return the call, and the butler there told her Miss Pringle was engaged with visitors, and showed her to the beggars' chair in the porch to wait? "

If not true, the legend was amusing, and applause only stopped on the entrance of Mrs. Henry. Miss Twomey had not expected that she would accept the invitation, given on a rash, expansive impulse. But Mrs. Henry came, in this hour of her defeat, to show that she did not care.

Everyone tactfully avoided the subject of Ardreenan. But their tact was an offence.

" Poor Miss Pringle ! " Mrs. Henry herself launched comment into the first pause. " You heard her latest? Young Russell? The charity boy, we call him. Mr. Henry said to her: ' Do you want to make a charity school of your place? ' But you know what these eccentric, rich old ladies are. Once they take a fancy into their heads, you can't make them listen to reason. I'm truly sorry for her. What'll become of the place, you know ! And after the trouble we had to persuade Mr. O'Mackesey to take it on. Mr. Henry's that worried, he's losing his sleep. I tell him he shouldn't be so conscientious, for you get no thanks. But he can't bear to see things go wrong."

" Well, well," said Mr. Jephson soothingly. " It might be a great deal worse. That's a smart youngster, and if your husband just keeps a fatherly eye over him——"

Mrs. Henry said with a sniff that her husband would do his best.

"To get rid of Mr. Russell! She'll see he does, the old cat," Mrs. Jephson whispered to Miss Dora behind the tea-tray.

Mr. Russell, being of a gregarious kind, already permeated Kilcashel, and had won all hearts to his side—except the Henrys'.

"It's a queer world!" said Mrs. Henry with cynicism. "And you'd certainly pity Miss Pringle. What with her own relation, Lord Pavington, letting her in for the like of this for an agent, and some other people that we know making themselves the talk of the county. I'm sure I don't know what to say of Miss Percival. Who's this West? And isn't it a queer thing for her to go pick up a strange man off the line, whatever he is? How did she know Mrs. Fitzgerald wouldn't take the daughter straight home?"

"How did she know it wasn't a case of the man's life?" demanded Mrs. Royce, ruffling for battle.

Miss Twomey made a vow to herself never again to ask poor Mrs. Henry to anything, and meanwhile appealed with her eyes to the doctor's wife to abstain from open warfare in her drawing-room. So Mrs. Royce joined Mrs. Jephson in a furious silence, and the offender was left in her glory to eat buttered scones with her gloves on.

CHAPTER VIII

——NOT REPENTING AT LEISURE

WHEN Pavington woke to a muddled consciousness at Derry Lodge, he had not the faintest recollection of his own identity. He only knew that he was a person with a headache, who was giving an inordinate amount of trouble to certain people who were extraordinarily kind. At first he was more interested in the headache, which was violent, than in its owner. But by degrees, as the throbbing and pain abated, he began to wonder a little who he was. After some more days he concluded vaguely that he must be someone in a book, since everyone called him by the wholly unfamiliar name of West.

By that name they condoled with him, gave him orders and arranged for him as for a creature without sense or responsibility of his own.

They, he supposed, were all in the book too. There was the doctor with the mellifluous Midland brogue, who complimented him on the toughness of his skull and would let him ask no questions. There was Mrs. Fitzgerald, a kind and understanding lady, who told him not to bother about anything till he was better. There was the authoritative child, who helped the doctor at first to attend to his damaged head. She had a smooth, fair, shiny head of her own that every stray sunbeam that stole into the room seemed to touch. Her movements were quick and certain, comfortable to watch. But her manner of speech was not comforting to anyone less deft than herself. The doctor treated her with respect; and so did even the

stout servant, who rolled in and out, forever in a hurry and ever smiling. There could be no doubt that Miss Honor Percival was mistress in this establishment.

The house was a little place near a country road—one of those wandering roads that he did not remember having wished to explore when he looked out at them from the train on the day of his journey. The rumble of passing carts came in subdued through the curtains, with the clink and ring of a not-far-distant forge. And all day long people came to inquire for Mr. West and another person, at the door just under his window.

Whoever this West was, he would appear to be of great importance and interest, not only to the immediate household, but to a whole countryside. Everyone was solicitous for him, and rejoiced that he was coming back to life after being nearly killed in an accident on their railway; and all made him feel that it was a proud thing to have survived it, and immensely to his own credit.

He was aware that someone else shared the distinction with him—some one who was spoken of as Patricia, and whose presence behind a door on the other side of the landing must be the real focus of interest in this tale, which, so far as it had developed, seemed singularly pointless and obscure.

A morning came when he woke free of headache, and made the astonishing discovery that he was himself alive and not imaginary, and that the things about him were real. Unencumbered by any conscious memories, his mind was alert and ready for impressions as never before in the life which he had forgotten. The first impression he received was that no fictitious stairs would creak with the definite and individual noise made by the stairs under stout Mary's foot, as she came up panting with his early tea. Mary Reddy herself was not the visionary type of figure, and the tea was hot. Indeed, it was little off the boil. Mary explained, when he praised it, that it hadn't far to

carry from the kitchen, where the pot had stood to draw on the side of the range. These details gave him a gratifying sense of being in contact with fundamentals. He had a strange, baseless conviction that, in his lost past, he had frequently suffered from tepid tea without ever having revealed to him the processes of its production.

" I am very much better to-day," he assured Mary. " And I am going to get up."

" To be sure you are," said she in the tone of specious encouragement used by her kind to children. She had been Miss Percival's nurse not so very long ago.

" But would you mind telling me," he said uncertainly—" might I ask, what is this you call me? "

" Dear, dear, dear, Mr. West! I think it'd be as lucky for you to stay in your bed, if you don't know your own name! "

" West? West? " He repeated the strange title dubiously.

The notion of anyone disclaiming his name tickled Mary so much that she had to roll out and finish her laugh on the landing. She thought he did it on purpose, to tease her, and put in her head when she had recovered to tell him he was a caution. Though he did not see that he could justly claim the credit, it flattered him to find himself so entertaining.

He could hear Mary reporting over the banisters to the lady of the house.

" He's a whole lot better to-day—ah, Miss Honor, child, couldn't you leave the hot water for me? He says he's getting up."

" Does he! " said the voice of Miss Honor, with a sweeping contempt for the liberty of the subject that made the listener wonder at the strength of mind developed in one so young.

Mary came in again with a can.

" Miss Percival says, sir, you're not to let a stir out

of you till the doctor sees you. But you may have the side window open if you like, for it won't be in your eyes."

The daylight, when she drew the curtains, showed him all the details of a room not calculated to remind him of stately Pavington Court. It was very small, and there were blue china animals in a row on the mantelpiece. Having studied these and the rest of the fittings exhaustively without catching any clue to his own past, he lay and pondered the present. Among other things he wondered, with a detached curiosity, what sort of man he, West, might be.

Mary seemed to find him a bit of a wag. Young Miss Percival evidently thought him a rash and unruly character, needing to be controlled with firmness. His opinion of himself was that he was giving more trouble than he could be worth. It was high time for him to recollect where he came from, and arrange to return there.

He knew his memory was somewhere locked away—if he could only lay his hand on the key.

It was a few days later that Honor Percival went in at the door across the landing with a heavily thoughtful air. Miss Percival thought with her mouth open, which was a pity, for it was a large mouth. It was well enough when shut, and, with a pair of vivid-blue eyes and the rest of her good, blunt features, made up a comely whole.

"Patricia," she said to her patient with the broken wrist, "Mr. West's a nuisance."

"Oh?" said Miss Fitzgerald. Studying her hostess shrewdly, with very bright eyes that found interest in all they looked on, she thought it was not like Honor to grudge trouble.

"The doctor says he'll put himself back, fussing about his blessed memory. Says he'd better come downstairs and have something to take his mind off. I don't know what there is downstairs to take his mind

off! I suppose it means talking to him, and what on earth's he to be talked to about, when he mustn't be let try to remember anything?" The abstract problem was too much for Miss Percival, and she sat down on the end of her friend's bed and frowned. "Your mother was going to help me to make the marmalade," she finished regretfully.

"Then let him cut up the oranges," said Patricia Fitzgerald, a person of quick resources.

"Shouldn't think he'd be much good at that," said Honor.

"He must be recovered enough to make himself useful, to judge by the jokes he seems to be having with Mary!"

A heartfelt guffaw from Mary Reddy re-echoed through the house, and Patricia, who was very susceptible to the infection of mirth, had to laugh too. Honor wondered why. She never laughed herself without reasonable grounds for amusement.

"I'd fuss myself if I was him and couldn't remember things. He might have been going for a job and have lost it. Or it might have been someone dying somewhere, or anything."

Honor's considerations were always practical. But Patricia dismissed these unhappy ideas.

"You know he couldn't be on any urgent business, or someone would have missed him and inquired. Now, I think it would be fun to wake up in an absolutely blank-new world! As to what to talk about—I'd be longing to know all about the place I'd happened into."

"I wouldn't care tuppence about a beastly new place," said Honor, with decision. "I'd be wanting to know about my own place, and how much was going wrong while I was away. Well, thank goodness, Royce is to let you down too. You can talk."

She went out of the room with her mouth shut,

having confidence in her ally. She had known Patricia Fitzgerald all her life, though not well, for their homes stood a dozen miles apart and they were further separated by the gulf of some eight years' difference in age. But ever since the accident the cautious doctor had kept Miss Fitzgerald in bed, till he could be sure that she had suffered nothing worse than a bad shaking and one broken bone. And in that time they had become well acquainted with each other's qualities.

In the afternoon, when West made his first entry into downstairs life, the Derry Lodge drawing-room looked very homely and cheerful. Ordinarily it had a little the chill and ornamental character of a farm front parlour, for Honor passed her normal day in the chicken run and the garden, and regarded an arm-chair only as a thing to fill a clean chintz cover with pink roses on it. But with Mrs. Fitzgerald sitting there, and a bright fire burning, the room had a different aspect. It was fragrant too with oranges and lemons, which Honor had piled on the table by the window, agreeable to Patricia's advice. Honor seldom asked advice, and never if she did not mean to take it.

The fruit in the sun made a glory of colour for eyes that had been many days in darkness. Outside the sunshine lay on thin grass that the moss shone through, and on silver and mottled boles of beeches; and far off, across a shadowed stretch of country, lit up the white-walled houses of a town that stood on a hill.

"You'll get your eyes bad again if you look into the light, you know," said Miss Percival; and he sat down obediently with his back to the window.

Honor looked out herself to see what on earth there had been to interest him, and descried a cow with a white head in the corner of a field.

"That's my cow," she remarked.

"A Hereford," he commented—and rose at once in Honor's estimation. She found he could talk intelligently about cows.

In Pavington's occupied life the one congenial duty had been the care of his estate, and his land-lore remained to him, though he did not know where he had learnt it. He did not realise, either, that this was the first time anyone as young as Honor had thought him intelligent.

There were wind and cloud and sunny showers out of doors, and he stole glances through the window when Miss Percival was not looking, and saw the moving sunshine pick out, one after another, white walls and glistening roofs where Kilcashel stood in the distance on its dark hill.

"What is that on the hill?" he asked at last.

"Oh, just the town," said Honor.

"The ugliest town in Ireland," added Mrs. Fitzgerald. "But full of interest."

"Interest?" questioned Honor.

"Just now, for instance," Mrs. Fitzgerald explained, "Kilcashel is very full of interest in Mr. West." Seeing Mr. West embarrassed as well as gratified by the idea of such public notice, she went on: "Also, Honor, in the affair of your godmother and her agent."

"Oh, Aunt Vinie and that boy——"

Honor noticed that Mr. West's hand went to his forehead. Agent—Kilcashel. The words had some disturbing association for his subconsciousness. With her quick understanding of bodily ills, Honor saw that the conversation was not good for his head; and she dropped it and gave him an orange to slice. She observed to herself that she had been right to get Patricia's advice, for it seemed to soothe him to have something to do with his hands. She had been right, too, in thinking that he would not be much use, for it was not long before he cut his finger with the knife,

which happened to be sharper at the back than at the front, being old.

She took away the knife and gave him a spoon to pick out pips with; and there was no transparent tactful ignoring of people's clumsiness with Honor. She was frankly scornful; and Mr. West found her manners very pleasant.

CHAPTER IX

"WHERE IGNORANCE——"

NEXT day, when Patricia Fitzgerald was at last allowed to come down, Mr. West received a shock. He had seen her before. He was sure of it, though she showed no recognition of him.

It pleased Honor to arrange a submissive patient on the sofa with plenty of cushions. But Miss Fitzgerald's strong private conviction that there was not really much the matter with her was apparent in spite of herself. She was paler than when he had seen her before—he had a distinct impression of the contrast of a fair, bright complexion and dark curling hair. But that delicate, irregular profile, the pretty mouth with its level strength and sweetness—he knew her face quite well.

Lest he should stare at her as much as he was tempted to, he looked away out of the window. Patricia noted how he watched the life of the country jogging by on the road, and wondered whether Honor had deigned to gratify any foolish curiosity he might feel about his new surroundings.

"You haven't had much opportunity yet of seeing what our country is like," she began.

"No?" he answered vaguely, for she had a bedazing effect on him. "Every man cannot have the right opportunity in this world, so——" He stopped to wonder why he was making so irrelevant a statement. The words had floated into his mind with a smell of wet earth that came in at the window from the soaked garden. After they had slipped off his tongue he fell

silent. He found there was something attached to the phrase, like a fish on a line, which he presently drew in from the deeps of his subconsciousness. It was a mental picture of a white-haired gentleman with a polished forehead, sitting in a deep armchair——

With that, a door seemed to open in his mind, and all at once he was perfectly aware of his own identity. He knew that he was just Pavington, who ought at this hour of the day to be writing business letters in a hurry for the post, in the still and sombre library at home.

Why, then, was he here? The last clear vision he had of the past was of his writing-table with its heavy files, and the dismal sheet of over-inked grey blotting-paper that he had so long endured rather than reprove the servant who had forgotten to change it. The lack of connection between that past and the present was something to stagger all reason. He was not strong enough to cope with it, or to put old and new together in any form of probability.

Honor came in from the front garden, where she had met the postman.

"There's a card from Aunt Vinie," she told Patricia. "She may come over to-day to inquire for you and Mr. West, but she says she won't come in. She says I must be 'very careful' and not let you be tired by visitors."

"Like her!" exclaimed Patricia, who was fond of Miss Pringle.

"That's Aunt Vinie." Honor spoke with resignation. "Always being careful. As if she'd hurt anyone by coming in and having her tea. Such a journey as it is for her, too, with those fat horses. This is about the only place she can get to in the afternoon. Mostly she has to start before lunch and take sandwiches in the brougham. Can you imagine her not having a motor, Mrs. Fitzgerald? I'm always at her to get one."

"My dear!" Mrs. Fitzgerald cried out. "I can't imagine her with a motor or anything so modern and fast. She is the most charmingly perfect Early Victorian. It would be a thousand pities to make her do anything to spoil her type."

"It can't be amusing, though, to live like a specimen in a glass case," Patricia reflected.

Honor wrinkled her brow.

"No fear of the car. As Mary says, you might as well be whistling jigs to a milestone."

Patricia was following a train of thought of her own.

"What about that young man," she asked, "that your friend Mr. Henry is so distracted over?"

"Oh, the Russell boy." Honor spoke from a height of ineffable pity. "He's quite harmless. I saw him the day I was over. Poor old Henry gets so excited, and of course Aunt Vinie is awfully unfair to him without meaning it. I daresay he doesn't know anything—Russell, I mean. But it won't be the fault of the people about the place if he doesn't get on. They're backing him up all they know, for fear of getting Henry back. I'm sorry for the poor wretch, too," she said, more kindly, "living in the house with Aunt Vinie! I should think he'd have to go outside the avenue gates to smoke. And if he was five minutes late for dinner! You know what she is."

"Yes," said Mrs. Fitzgerald, smiling. "Though we have never seen as much of your Aunt Vinie as we should like to. She is really a distant connection of ours too—through the Babingtons, you know, of Boyle."

Pavington raised his head, seeing an easy way to the correction of the mistake they were making about his name.

"The Babingtons of Boyle? They are connections of mine too," he said. And he would then and there have disclosed his derivation and real name; but

Honor looked on him with a sternly sceptical eye, and interrupted firmly. He was not to be let remember things, even supposing he could.

"I don't suppose he'll stick it there long." She reverted to the safe subject of Mr. Russell, who could have no connection with Mr. West's past. "Aunt Vinie's a great deal too good to everyone, really, but she must have her own way, and her ways are——" She stopped, at a loss for a word meaning antediluvian and hopeless that it would not be disloyal to apply to her adoptive aunt.

A motor bicycle came thunderously down the road and turned in at the gate. Honor went to the window.

"Speak of the devil—it's that boy. Heavens!" she swung round to the three in the room with a blank expression, "it's Aunt Vinie in the side-car."

It was with accentuated dignity that Miss Pringle made her entrance some minutes later. Her god-daughter had welcomed her at the door with tactless amazement. She was not, moreover, accustomed to arriving blown-about and dishevelled and having to be put to rights in the hall.

Miss Pringle had a style of dressing of her own, which was becoming to her comfortable figure. Uninfluenced by changing fashions, it had almost acquired the distinction of a costume. With her ripples of white hair, her clear eyes and bright colour, she might have been a lady in a picture—some old picture of a Quaker lady. Jack was innocent enough to be proud of her appearance, which Honor knew to be all wrong.

She unbent to kiss the Fitzgeralds, whom she also would have liked to see much oftener. Honor waited for Mrs. Fitzgerald to do the introducing of Mr West; Mrs. Fitzgerald waited for the lady of the house; and Miss Pringle did not wait at all to express her pleasure at seeing him so far recovered after his terrible adventure. So Pavington never heard her name.

She sat by Mrs. Fitzgerald, and tried in an under-

tone to explain away the manner of her coming. Jack Russell had gone to so much trouble to borrow that machine and get it to go. He had it ready for a surprise for her, and expected her to be pleased. So —in fact—she had to be pleased. It appeared to Mrs. Fitzgerald that she was really very much pleased with herself for her exploit, and also that she had very thoroughly annexed Mr. Jack Russell for her own property.

" Oh, my! " said Miss Pringle suddenly with horror. " Jack, I haven't got the little parcel."

It always worried Honor the way her godmother made herself ridiculous with tragic fusses over trifles. She would not have encouraged her as Mr. Russell did, with serious sympathy.

" Can we have left it behind, after all? " said Miss Pringle, distracted. She knew it would be entirely her own fault if it were left behind, for Jack had wanted to stow it in the toe of the side-car, and she would not trust it to him, but kept it in her own hand. The use of the pronoun ' we ' was therefore not justified. But she considered it the privilege of her years never to be in the wrong.

" I suppose we must have done something like that," said Jack. " But I'll look if it's in the bus anywhere."

A great silence fell on the room when he went out of it.

" I am afraid "—Miss Pringle apologised to Mrs. Fitzgerald—" he is rather a chatterbox. But he is very kind to me."

She was pleased to see that Elinor Fitzgerald approved of her agent, but not surprised. Who could help liking Jack? It was a distinct grace, though not of course a moral quality, in a person of his age to have a curly head. A pity those clever Fitzgerald boys were all dark like their sister and as sleek as otters.

Honor, at the window, drew attention to the fact

that Mr. Russell had wheeled the bus round and was looking at his watch.

" I suppose he isn't going back to Ardreenan to look for your parcel, Aunt Vinie? " she said in a tone which expressed the estimate she had formed of Mr. Russell's mental calibre.

" Oh, good gracious me, I'm sure he is! " Miss Pringle was on her feet in a flurry and out in the hall before Honor could forestall her. " Come in at once, you dreadful boy! " she said at the hall door. " What will you try to do next? "

" It wouldn't take me any time to run over and back," said Jack.

" As a matter of fact, I have just remembered where I laid down that parcel."

Miss Pringle recovered a package of considerable size from the dark corner where she had hastily bestowed it on arrival, together with her silver-knobbed umbrella.

" I say, Aunt Vinie, you hid it pretty well," said Honor.

As a matter of fact, Miss Pringle had wished to suppress the umbrella. Jack had said at Ardreenan that he did not think she would want it in the side-car. But she, who had never in her life gone beyond her own gates unprovided for the contingency of rain, did not see why she should begin to be imprudent now. Only when they were well started on their breathless course she realised that an umbrella was inappropriate to the circumstances, and perhaps a little foolish. She would have preferred that no one should notice her having brought it. But Honor was noticing, and Miss Pringle did not think it good for her goddaughter to look in that way on the proceedings of her elders.

" You see, my dear," she said firmly, " I am prepared to go round your garden in spite of the showers."

She handed over the package.

"Some of the little invalid light cakes from my mother's recipe, dear, and another jelly, and some little odds and ends that it will be a help for you to have all ready. It is such a responsibility for you, the housekeeping, with two invalids. But I'm sure Mrs. Fitzgerald advises you?"

Honor did not say that Mrs. Fitzgerald knew better, but she thought it. She had foreseen what the parcel would be—some tangible proof of her godmother's distrust of her management. She had been making great efforts to be ready to thank gratefully. In the event, the effort was more obvious than the gratitude; and Jack, listening in a spirit of strong partisanship, thought Miss Pringle had better not send in specially to the town the next time she was having things made for Miss Honor Percival.

Honor had taken untold trouble to have everything comfortable for those under her roof. To have extra things landed in to be eaten disorganised her careful arrangements. And she was really tired out, and more susceptible than was normal with her. It did seem queer that Aunt Vinie, who was the one person in the world sort of belonging to her, should be the one to think she could do nothing right. If she had been a different sort of girl she might have felt inclined to run away and cry. But not being of that kind, she carried the eatables with due care to the kitchen and scolded Mary.

Miss Pringle might have been accustomed to misunderstanding her goddaughter, as she had never been able to do anything else with her since she was a baby. But these incidents never failed to hurt and disappoint her.

"I'm afraid the parcel was quite the wrong thing," she whispered to Jack.

"If she doesn't like it, she'd better give it back," said he.

Thinking over it afterwards, Miss Pringle could not

see that this was intrinsically a brilliant rejoinder, or that there was anything deep or subtle in it. But the large manner of it impressed her greatly, and revealed to her the truth that the incident, all said and done, was small. If dear Honor *was* offended, she would get over it. The essential was for the young people to make friends, for it would be so good for them both.

Honor was quite ready to take Mr. Russell out to see her place, for she thought him too noisy in the house for Mr. West's head. She was cross and silent, and Jack disapproving and stiff. His stiffness must be understood to be relative, and the offending Honor did not happen to notice it. But it was not lost on Patricia, who was up and at the window to see Miss Pringle justify her umbrella by strolling in the garden with Mrs. Fitzgerald.

Patricia had black-lashed hazel eyes that betrayed her when she was amused. To be alone with her was an experience that scattered all of Pavington's wits that he had reassembled.

"Did you ever know anyone before who had never been alive in their life?" she asked; and then was ashamed of her heedlessness, seeing Mr. West's confusion. "Like our dear Miss Pringle," she hurried on.

"*Pringle?*" he repeated.

She only thought he was worried because her question reminded him of his lost memory.

"Whoever sent her that creature as an estate agent——" She sought to draw his attention away.

"Estate agent!" he exclaimed; and she grew still more penitent for the way she had disturbed his mind, and determined that it should be diverted to the joyous topic of the moment.

"Perhaps it was confiding to send Mr. Russell to manage the biggest estate in the county! But for Miss Pringle herself"—her fancy was off at Ardreenan, picturing the effect of a boy there, after all the empty

quiet years that its mistress had let drift her so near to a lonely and narrow old age—"could you imagine a greater godsend? He'll make her come alive," she declared, with an energy that drove a little of her meaning into Pavington's bewildered brain. "And if she loses him again it will be a calamity!"

"Who did you say—who sent him?" Pavington asked weakly.

"Oh, her friends in England. Someone resourceful." Patricia laughed, enchanted with the occurrence. "It just shows. She's never gone anywhere. But she's having her drawing-room done up, and my mother asked her to come to Geraldstown meanwhile, and bring the boy, and she's coming, because it will be 'nice for Jack.' Now, we must all do everything we can to make her keep him, in spite of Mr. Henry!"

The others came in from the garden, so that Pavington could not think out the implications of what he had heard. Mrs. Fitzgerald was saying that she hoped the invalids would be well enough next week for them all to adjourn to Geraldstown. And Miss Pringle was exclaiming at the idea of such a rash undertaking as moving two injured people all that way so soon.

"Jack," she said, "do you think we shall have the new motor in time to—to 'run them over'?"

CHAPTER X

"COMING EVENTS——"

"WHAT is Ardreenan coming to!" said Mrs. Fitzgerald, when they were gone.

Pavington had a sudden vivid recollection of the look of a letter headed: 'Ardreenan, Kilcashel.' It was a lengthy letter in a fine sloped writing, full of long S's and deficient in stops. It asked him, for reasons so much explained that they were difficult to follow, to undertake the responsibility of engaging a new agent for the Ardreenan estate. It was signed by his cousin, Lavinia Pringle.

So that was Lavinia. And that was her new agent for whom he was responsible?

Further discussion of Ardreenan was prevented by Mary, who came to say that Mick Farrelly was there to see Mrs. Fitzgerald. The Fitzgeralds had a convenient link with their home in this young man, who lived near Geraldstown and was working on the line beyond Derry Lodge, and was always ready to take messages. Pavington was thankful for the interruption, for he knew it would be proper to announce himself as Lavinia's relative before they said more about her, and he did not feel equal to the effort. The thought of having sent Mr. Russell in response to his cousin's letter had been too much for him, and his head was swimming.

Young Farrelly had been employed in clearing up on the railway after the accident. His accounts of the wreckage were effective, and Pavington enjoyed

the report of them. He was troubled by no premonition that this unlikely youth would be involved in the confusion which entangled himself and his cousin's agent; and heard without heeding Patricia's inquiries for Mary Agnes Farrelly, a sister, about whose state of health she was concerned.

Alone in his own room later, he tried to face the situation. But he found himself altogether unequal to it, and could only see clearly that it was too delicate for him to meddle with before he was in full command of his faculties. For one thing, he did not know why he was masquerading here under a false name. For another, was he not involved in a conspiracy with Miss Fitzgerald to thwart Lavinia Pringle's man of business in his very natural desire to return Mr. Russell whence he came?

He had not the faintest recollection of what he had done about Lavinia's commission. He supposed he must write to Findon and find out. Findon would have access to his papers and copies of correspondence. He looked round the room for writing materials, which were not there; sat down wearily and closed his eyes —and found himself remembering his contest with Findon. How could he have forgotten that memorable interview? So, West was the non-committal alias he had chosen for himself. He recalled his journey too, though confusedly. There had been a wayside station where first he had seen Miss Fitzgerald. Then must have come the accident, which Findon would say was a judgment——

It was disconcerting the way forgotten facts kept starting into his consciousness as though at the touch of a spring. Of course, he had written instructing Findon to find a suitable agent for Ardreenan, and had posted the letter in the pocket of his overcoat, which—by Farrelly's descriptions—would be in shreds and buried in the railway bank. That explained things. Lavinia, no doubt, hearing nothing, had

given him up as a broken reed and procured her agent elsewhere.

Still absent-mindedly fumbling through his pockets for a pen, he discovered the stained and sticky handkerchief which he had wrapped round his bleeding finger the day before. It was a disgusting object, and he did not know what to do with it. Staring him in the face from the one clean corner was his real name —a laundry-mark of the most blatant order. It struck him that if he sent the thing to the wash it would look as if he had picked his own pocket. Mary would comment with her usual freedom, and he might have to explain. The thought of resuming that name filled him with more disgust than did the handkerchief. It stood for all that he had fled from, for imprisonment. Of a sudden he realised to the full how much he was enjoying being West.

He abandoned the search for pen and paper. He would not write to Findon and give himself away. Not till he had thought things over. It was all very complicated, and his head was aching again, and he could not think clearly of anything except of Patricia Fitzgerald.

He rolled the offending handkerchief into a ball with the marked corner inmost. It was an oversight, having it with him. He knew that he had provided himself with an outfit to match his travelling name. When Mary relit his fire, he would burn it. Meanwhile there was a mousehole in the skirting-board convenient to his hand where he sat. He poked it in. That was one perplexity out of sight, at least for the moment.

CHAPTER XI

LOVE ME, LOVE MY DOG

THE Fitzgeralds hastened the removal from Derry Lodge, being anxious to relieve Honor, whom they persuaded to go with them to Geraldstown for a holiday. Miss Pringle did not get her car in time to facilitate the move, but she arrived in it herself a few days later, with her agent, whom alone she trusted to drive it. It was twenty years since she had seen Geraldstown, and she was shocked at the change she found. It seemed to her disastrous, measured by the standard of trim and prosperous Ardreenan. But the Fitzgeralds themselves took changes as a matter of course, and wanted no pity for the burnt wing of their house, since they were living on the compensation for it.

The members of the household most critically disposed towards visitors were Patricia's young sisters, Kitty and Rose. In the opinion of these experts, Honor was hopeless because she laughed at them. Jack did that too. But, then, he laughed at everything, and everyone laughed at him, so it didn't matter. Miss Pringle was nice. She would almost have been specially nice if she could have understood that people of eleven and thirteen were no longer so very young.

But Mr. West was an altogether glorious person—one who never was disrespectful to other people just because they didn't happen to be grown up; who liked getting muddy all over, and appreciated the million possibilities of the stream behind the haggard, nor ever suggested that it was cold and damp. The elders

of their own family knew a great deal about really exciting things like cuckoos' eggs and where to look for badgers. But Mr. West knew everything in the world, and told them of wonders undreamed-of. And he didn't write letters or stupid things, and had leisure at all hours of the day to answer questions or come out and see things.

It would have been a good time in any case for the children, since their sister Pat, as an invalid with a broken wrist, could not be as busy as usual, and had time to go on the lake with them in the leaky boat that they might not take out by themselves, to help break in the young donkey that kicked to tandem harness, and generally to join in all pursuits that were suitably restful and healthy. This was enough to make it a great time, but having Mr. West as well made it memorable.

Mr. West, by this, had admitted that his memory was no longer blank. He had given some account of himself in general terms—he lived alone in the English Midlands; was treating himself to a holiday from business and a year's travelling; was half Irish. But it was assumed that names and details still bothered him, as he never volunteered any. So everyone was careful to avoid leading questions.

Honor's incurious disposition was an especial comfort in this connection. It never occurred to her to want to know about anything which, like Mr. West's past, did not belong to the county where she had been born. So it was no trouble to her to abstain from asking questions. On the other hand, she could impart her store of local information unchecked by any doubt of its intrinsic worth. And truly Mr. West could always be interested in everything. It flattered him immensely to find himself in Honor's confidence, and he was pleased to help her to polish the old Geraldstown silver, whose condition had offended her housewifely eye from the first moment of her arrival.

Geraldstown was a place where details were neglected for essentials. Successive Land Acts had reduced the family revenue to a degree that would have meant tragedy in many houses. But the Fitzgeralds had adaptability and intelligence and an independent mind as to appearances, and they managed to live on in their place with some comfort and much pleasure. The sons won scholarships, the daughters educated each other at home. In winter they hunted on farm-horses and colts and loans from neighbours, went about on bicycles and with the donkey-shay in summer, kept up a library subscription the year round, and—did without plate-powder. When they wanted to have visitors they had them, and the girls helped the inadequate staff with the extra work, and generally the visitors helped too.

Honor had taken Geraldstown firmly in hand.

As to Pavington, it was his life's habit to make himself useful, though hiterto in other directions, and he had not before found the practice so amusing. The Fitzgeralds had adopted him with enthusiasm. The neighbours thought it a privilege to meet the hero of the great accident. His general importance, in fact, was such that it was even reflected in a faint shade of respect in Honor's tone when she spoke.

"You seem to be telling Jack a good deal about estate work. It's as well someone should. Whatever that old Lord Pavington was thinking of, to send over a man with no earthly experience! There must be something pretty queer about him, anyway, the way Jack shuts up about him always."

"Miss Pringle told you it was Pavington who sent him?" he asked presently.

"Yes. At least, no." Honor could not claim that her godmother consulted her about business. "She did say something once about applying to the head of her family. But it was Mrs. Royce who was saying that Mr. Jephson said that Mr. Henry told him he'd

seen the letter Jack brought with him, and it was signed 'Pavington.' Why? You aren't interested in Lord Pavington, are you?"

"Not at all," said Pavington with truth. But he was painfully interested in the news that Russell had come with his recommendation. That rashly-signed note of recommendation was enclosed, as he believed, in the letter to Findon which he had thought safely buried in the railway embankment with the shreds of his coat. Someone might have found and posted it. But between the date of the accident and that of the agent's installation there was not time for Findon, being Findon, to have made any appointment at all. Findon was a well-balanced man, and never precipitate. Nor would he, in any length of time, have dreamed of appointing Mr. Russell. If Russell had produced that paper, then he had come by it unlawfully and was an impostor.

A distant burbling sound of conversation heralded the approach of the young man in question. He came in with Patricia to say that he had the car ready to run over to Ardreenan, and wasn't Honor coming as well as the kids? Pavington looked at him earnestly, trying to realise that he must be playing a crafty part—and failed.

"You like Russell?" he asked Patricia, when the others had gone out, wrangling over the road-map.

"Of course. He's a dear boy."

"A particularly open, honest sort of boy, he seems."

"Not to say transparent."

Mr. West fell into a fit of abstraction. Jack's and Honor's voices were raised outside the window, in vehement argument over possible and impossible roads. It was Jack who gave in at the end with unruffled good-humour.

"You're dead wrong, but have it your own way," he said. He was of the gregarious kind, and would put up with anything for the sake of company.

"I suppose they'll fight like that all the way there?" Pavington wondered.

"And all the way back," said Patricia. "They'll be very happy—like young puppies."

Pavington was wondering whether their association was not likely to develop into something more than the companionship of puppies. He tried to think. How could he let things go on, knowing what he did? Yet, again, how was it possible to credit that youth with the talent to act a part, as he must be acting? If the fraud were exposed, the boy's career would be blighted, and Lavinia Pringle how grievously disillusioned! Honor's happiness might be involved. And Patricia, who made all their interests her own, would be in despair. It was too serious a matter to act in lightly. He must be careful, and say nothing till he saw more and till his head was clearer.

Meanwhile, he was here under false pretences himself, and he could not now confess without exposing young Russell.

Patricia wanted to go to the house of the Farrellys that afternoon, and Mr. West drove her thither in the donkey-trap. They were classed together as still only convalescent, and not allowed to be too active—a classification which to one of them at least was entirely satisfactory. As the leisurely ass progressed down the mile-and-a-half long avenue, Patricia told of the troubles of the family they were to visit—how two daughters had died of consumption, and the youngest, Mary Agnes, now was threatened and in a critical state, and the second boy was delicate too.

In sight of their destination she called a halt. The Farrellys had a visitor, and she did not want to disturb. It was no hardship to loiter, this warm, sunny spring evening, with the valley before them steeped in a glamorous light. Out of a thicket on the hill above them, where the blackthorn scrub was fluffing into blossom, a thrush sang. The road followed the foot

of the slope, and the Farrelly house stood under the road. Behind the house the level valley floor was dark with rushes and lush with marsh-weeds. Here and there a feather of mist was rising.

"Look at it!" said Patricia. "It'll be over the chimneys by night. A hopeless place."

But the low sun blazed full on the white house and struck sparks out of the window-panes, even through their screen of geranium plants. There was a pony in a trap too big for it tied at the gate in front, and its chestnut coat glowed like fire. The same warm light dealt kindly with the blue jumper a girl wore who was sitting on the wall.

"That's Mary Agnes," said Patricia. "And she's seventeen. You know the whole world goes by here, for it's the main road between Geraldstown West and Kilcashel. The people going to the fairs, and funerals, and the Civic Guard—everything heart could desire. It's a wonderful thing to live in a house on the road when you're seventeen—and pretty. The other plain lump of a girl's been shopping in the town and has stopped to show her parcels. Something thrilling in the drapery line in that one, as they're getting Mrs. Farrelly out to feel it. She's a person whose opinion is worth having. Oh, she shouldn't do that!"—The check-aproned woman who came out of the house laid a coat round the blue girl's shoulders.—"Always reminding the child!

For this girl it was no vague fate impending, but a familiar horror. She had seen how it had gone with her sisters, knew all the squalid misery of disease. She who was so pretty and so vain—thought Patricia, sad and exasperated. The mother would have died for Mary Agnes, but she could not keep from crying in front of her, could not hope for her, just gave in to fate.

The feathery mists had gathered into a film when the girl with the pony-trap went on down the road, the way of the healthy world.

Patricia asked Mr. West to go into the house with her, knowing that Mick's family would take a special interest in the gentleman so nearly killed on the railway. The Farrelly home had a swept floor and a proud dresser, where old willow-pattern dishes lurked behind the crowded jugs by whose number a householder's standing is measured. An excellent smell of baking issued from the door, and also a hen, whished out with the corner of Mrs. Farrelly's apron that she had wiped her eyes with to see who was coming. It was not a home to be given up readily, even if another house were easy to find. Pavington admired the place. Mrs. Farrelly let her hands drop on her knees with a little hopeless gesture. She would have no girl to help her with it soon.——But that was a fearful thing to happen on the railway, where there never was an accident before.

Mary Agnes turned the fan in the chimney corner—a soothing occupation for anyone a little awed and nervous. She had chestnut hair in a curly mop, and the transparent skin and colour of her delicacy. Patricia encouraged her vanity shamelessly with a ribbon to trim a hat, and made her fetch the hat and try it on in the light at the open door. The mother dropped her hands again with the gesture she could not help.

Patricia inquired for Mick.

"They tell me he's after Henrieses' cook in Kilcashel," Mrs. Farrelly said with detachment; and as casually: "I'd a letter from my brother—was it a-Monday, Mary?"

"It was Saturday, Mother."

"A-Saturday."

"Had he got yours?" Patricia asked eagerly.

"The one you made me write, Miss Pat?" She had written no other in a dozen years. "Well, he had."

Patricia sent the girl out to show Mr. West her garden.

" Can your brother help? " she asked when she and her friend were alone.

" Well, he can't. I'll show you what he says. He would if he could, sure, for he'd only be glad to have the young ones over, and so would the wife, seeing they've no family."

This was another hope gone.

" It's the will of God, Miss Pat dear."

At any rate Mr. West's visit was an entire success.

" That's a nice plain gentleman," Mrs. Farrelly observed, with high approval. " Real plain and humble, and 't only a miracle he's alive at all! However yous escaped with your lives, yourself and him? " The mishap to the train had by this time attained to an epic grandeur. " Was Mick telling you what was the last thing he turned up where they were clearing the line? A letter, closed and stamped and all, and dear knows what's happened the poor creature that wrote it! "

" He should post it. It might be something important."

" That's true, too. It hadn't e'er an address on it."

" Then it mightn't be so much use," Patricia agreed.

" All blotted out, like, with the rain and dirt."

" He might open it, and see if there's an address inside it could be returned to."

" I'll tell him to give it to yourself, Miss Pat."

" All right," said Patricia.

As they urged the ass homewards under the castellated gateway with the coat of arms in granite, Patricia looked with an unwontedly bitter amusement at the paint flaking off the tall, iron gates and at the rough and rutted avenue. Geraldstown had been a very great place in its day, but its day was over. It was very right, of course, for times to change, for the people to own the land. If only everything would change together, and they would not still look to Geraldstown

as a refuge in trouble when Geraldstown no longer had power to help.

They had had Mary Agnes up at the house, but she fretted and the mother took her away. The inert Peter, her brother, would not stir from home. The one certain cure would be a couple of years in a dry climate. If only they could go to the uncle in the Argentine who wrote so nicely! He would have gone to meet them at Buenos Ayres, but he could not help further with their travelling, and the cost put it out of the question.

If Patricia talked more of what was on her mind than she meant to, and more than it were reasonable to inflict on a stranger, it was Mr. West's own fault because he listened.

"If they had their tickets to Buenos Ayres, you think it would be all right?" he said.

"All the expenses would come to nearly a hundred pounds. It is quite impossible."

Next morning Pavington gave Patricia a hundred-pound note for the Farrellys. He had not quite realised beforehand the sensational nature of the transaction. Nor had he taken into account that the whole household must know of the event immediately, and the whole countryside soon after. Least of all had he expected to be driven to the Farrellys' to present his gift in person.

"They must have it in their own hands," Patricia said. "Think of the thrill. Such a thing will never have been seen before. Farrelly can be trusted to lodge it safely in the bank. But of course we must see to all the arrangements for them."

"Don't book their passages till you're sure they're going," said her father. But Patricia, in her relief and exultation, took no heed.

Pavington guessed that Colonel Fitzgerald could not enjoy having his ex-tenants helped by an outsider; and he was right. Besides, he suspected that the

hundred pounds was given partly to make Patricia happy, and he was never well disposed towards young men who ingratiated themselves with his eldest daughter. It was all very well, and West was a very nice fellow. But who and what was he? All they really knew about him was that he was going to America, and was too queer in the head to be asked any questions. He had a good mind to get Elinor to write to the Babingtons, whom their guest had claimed as connections.

Nevertheless, when Pavington, in his discomfort, came sadly and said that he ought to be leaving in the next days, the Colonel's instincts got the better of him. He was constitutionally averse to letting any guest depart.

"Nonsense!" he said. "America won't run away."

And Pavington let himself be persuaded.

After all, the Colonel knew his neighbours best. The house was full of sailing lists and Patricia of joy, till she went to warn the Farrellys of the date finally arranged for the young people's start. She came back with the hundred-pound note in her hand. The children would not go.

They could not face the journey. Farrelly himself was for sending them, but the mother thought bad. Mary Agnes was crying all day, and Peter, according to his mother, roaring crying. And that was an end of it. Mrs. Farrelly had, indeed, no great motive for urging them to go. If they were at home, she could mind them. If they went away, they might get strong or they might not, but she would never see them again. To her it was a parting as final as death, and more lonely, she said, than if their two graves were below beside the sisters'. They'd hardly write. How would they? Sure, they were young.

Patricia knew there was truth on her side. It was quite possible the two would not come back once started in the New World. It was as likely as not that

they would never write. If they stayed out there and did well, they might send home money at intervals till they married. If they did not prosper and had nothing to send, it was most probable the parents would never hear of them again. There was something to be said for Mrs. Farrelly.

Honor considered that the sooner the race of such hopeless people was extinct the better, and she said so in other words.

Then Miss Pringle arose.

"This is great nonsense," she said. "And the parents must not be allowed to be so selfish." Miss Pringle did not believe in free will for many people besides herself. "It is a case of the children's lives, and if they cannot travel by themselves, they must be taken. Now I have an idea."

Patricia and Honor were engaged to come back with her to Ardreenan. Now, instead, she would take them for a little foreign trip. And Jack, of course. They would go to the Canaries on the same boat as the children, and see them so far on their way. They might return through Spain and France.

"My dear!" said Mrs. Fitzgerald, amazed. But Miss Pringle, once she saw what should be done, was not to be daunted. The purchase of that car had done more than astonish Kilcashel. It had awakened her to the power of her wealth. Patricia spoke of travelling as the most natural thing in the world, and a little trip would do them all good. Honor, like herself, had never been out of Ireland.

Then, if Mr. West really meant to go round the world, he would be very foolish, so soon after his accident, not to experiment with a little journey first and see how much he was up for. Why should he not join the party?

Mr. West saw no reason.

So Jack, on his return from an expedition to Ardreenan, was greeted with the intelligence that he

must arrange to leave the estate for at least three weeks and as soon as possible.

"But look here!" said he. "I can't go, you know. What would I be *for*? Aren't you paying me to look after Ardreenan?"

"I pay you to do as you are bid," said Miss Pringle succinctly.

"Oh, rather. But there are one or two things that I really couldn't leave—that I'd have to see after myself." Jack was apt to forget that no one in this world is indispensable. "Of course," he reflected, "Andy Mack could do it for me, if he would. But you wouldn't approve of him, would you?"

By this time Jack had discovered the identity of the mysterious monitor, whom he met from time to time in sequestered places, and who had become one among his many dear friends and allies.

"Mackesey?" Miss Pringle considered in some amusement. "I think he would do it for us. And for a short time, and as your understudy, I don't suppose it would be much harm. Murphy would not like it, of course, and it would be impossible for more than a couple of weeks. But I have an old regard for Mackesey, and should be glad to show that I appreciate him personally."

CHAPTER XII

LETTER OF MARK

IT may have been a coincidence that, on the day when the hundred-pound note was lodged at the bank, Mrs. Jephson, the manager's wife, got cakes at the confectioner's and gathered a few friends in to an impromptu tea. Mrs. Henry was not present; and the Rector, Mrs. Royce and the Twomeys all agreed that Mr. West must be a prince in disguise, and at any rate that he was altogether charming. Even Mr. Russell was slightly eclipsed in popular favour, though by no means forgotten.

"It's wonderful how he's making good, for such a young chap," said the Rector, with reference to the latter personage.

"I always said he would," Mr. Jephson reminded the company. "That Lord Pavington, that Henry blames so much for sending him over, must be a judge of character."

"Though, from anything Jack Russell ever says of him," Mrs. Jephson remarked, "you wouldn't think he was much."

"Lord Pavington? I remember his mother." Old Miss Twomey drifted into reminiscence. "Long ago, when she came to stay at Ardreenan with our Miss Pringle's mother. Lady Pavington was very stiff. Really she'd never say anything to anybody. They said she was shy, and that might have been true, though it's hard to think it in her position. I was asking Mr. Russell about the present lord, but he didn't seem to like to talk about him. I think he can't be a

right sort of man, for indeed Mr. Russell would tell me nothing, and of course he wouldn't want to say anything against Miss Pringle's relation, and when he owes the job to him, too, as we know from Mr. Henry."

In spite of this intriguing reticence of Mr. Russell's, Lord Pavington was not interesting enough to compete long, as a topic, with Miss Pringle's new car, that wonder which had not yet lost its freshness.

Over the way at the Henry house, meantime, Anne Shane in the kitchen was entertaining Michael Farrelly. Mick had work on the railway near the town, these days, and was able to look in every evening. This particular evening he rose to go earlier than usual. He had to go round by the House to see Miss Patricia about that letter, he said, and produced a muddy and sodden missive from his pocket to show that he spoke the truth.

The girl took it from him, and tried to decipher the address. She had an inquiring mind, and it occurred to her that the inside might better repay study. She accordingly tore the envelope open and read the contents. Mick was prudent by nature, and would have preferred to hand it over intact to someone responsible, lest at any time there should be questions asked. But he could not in manners pass any remark to Anne Shane.

Pavington's hand was not clear at the best of times, and the letter was blurred with damp that had soaked through the envelope. It baffled Anne more than she would admit, but with perseverance she gathered an impression.

"Glory be to God!" she said. "It's all Pringleses' agent. The work there is over Pringleses'! Do you know what? This'll be worth a bob to you if you give it them above." She indicated her employers' part of the house.

"Do you tell me!" said Mick. But he was in a

difficulty. "I wouldn't like to disappoint Miss Patricia, and my mother after saying what she did."

"Go along. What's it matter to Miss Fitzger'ld? She wouldn't care if you ate it."

"I'd think bad to do it," said Mick.

Nanny Shane was of a coarser fibre than he, and did not see that to hand over the document to the lawyer after Miss Patricia had undertaken to deal with it would imply a lesser confidence in her, since a shilling was by nature unmentionable. Mick was a wise young man and appreciated shillings. But he would forfeit one, or even eighteenpence, rather than be guilty of discourtesy. The Farrellys were widely known for very correct people.

"It'll do," he considered, "if I tell her I lost it. I'll tell her it was the ganger sent me to his daughter that's married on the New Road with a—with a pair of rabbits. And I got off the bike at the forge at the cross to—to ask the smith had he the time on him. And the old goat that's in it come behind me and ate the whole concern out of my jacket-pocket, and three fags along of it, and I never minded till she had the last bit down."

"Tell her what you like," said Nanny, a little huffed by the goat, which she took as personal. "So long as you don't tell him above I touched the envelope. A very excitable man is Mr. Henry. Tell him it was that way when you got it."

She rubbed her thumb over the torn edge of the flap lest it should appear too clean.

To Mr. Henry, in due course, Mick explained that he had found the letter open as it was now, and seeing something in it about Miss Pringle's place, had thought it right to show it.

Excitable was the word for Mr. Henry. He looked first at the signature and exclaimed, then read the whole thing greedily and fastened on two words at the head of the paper.

"Enclosures," he said. "There should be two enclosures in this, and they aren't here. Are you sure now," he demanded sharply, "you lost nothing out of this?"

Here was the trouble Mick had feared when Nanny tore the envelope. But Mr. Henry accepted his denial with surprising readiness, and gave him half a crown.

"You did right to bring it to me," he said. "I'll keep it and attend to it."

They parted in a high state of mutual appreciation.

Mr. Henry, when he was alone, strode about the room in a flurry of spirits. Could it be that a triumph even greater than he had looked for was at hand? Wild imaginations filled his brain. He studied again the uncancelled English stamps, the date inside, the torn flap. In soberest earnest, the thing was very queer.

It was easy for him, with the unusual name of Findon, the terms of the letter and what was discernible of the address, to identify Messrs. Findon, Harte and Barker in the legal directory. He sat down and wrote to Mr. Findon of that firm with a confusion in his heart of anxiety for Ardreenan and hopeful anticipation of a reckoning for that young Russell.

CHAPTER XIII

FOX, GOOSE AND CABBAGE

IF Ardreenan Hill had risen from its foundations, the neighbourhood could have been but little more surprised than it was when it heard that Miss Pringle was going abroad with a party.

For her trip was really to be. The plan defeated the Farrellys' reluctance. The day for sailing had been fixed, and Geraldstown was a vortex of preparations. This trip was a great and joyous adventure for those concerned, and if they had been making ready for a voyage round the world, the house could have been in no more glorious commotion.

Only Honor, superior to childish exhilarations, drove the sewing-machine in a relentless stolidity, and took her share of pleasure out of the firm belief that nothing would be ready in ten days' time if everyone got excited.

Patricia was in her element in a vortex. And Miss Pringle sat in the drawing-room and savoured the curious sensation of having herself given rise to all the excitement. There was an unusual light in her eyes, these days, partly—though she would not have owned it—because, under Patricia's influence, the dresses she had ordered for the expedition were such as she would not have worn at home.

The big, bright drawing-room was the very heart of the bustle, since it was the custom of the family to do many things on the floor there which in Lavinia Pringle's scheme of the universe were done on tables in retired parts of the house. It was a shock to her that

Elinor should not merely allow her daughters to cut out their dresses there, but should sit on her own heels helping them, as likely as not in the afternoon, irrespective of possible callers. It could not be ascribed to ignorance on Elinor's part, for she had moved in high places before settling down in sunny, shabby Geraldstown, where no blind was ever drawn to spare the carpets. Lavinia concluded that everyone but herself was inherently peculiar, and that it was a mercy they were not trying to be ready for this week's boat, or goodness knows what they might come to.

It was Mr. West's proper part to find out trains and hotels and sailings. But he was impressed, on a morning, to read out the newspaper in the absence of the Colonel, who was holding a review of battered suitcases in the study and turning out his ancestral collection of odd keys. Mr. West skipped a paragraph which mentioned the by-election to be held next month at Tiddon Magna, congratulating himself with devout thanksgiving that his name was West and not Pavington. Pavington, the idiotic ass, would have gone back for that election—so abject a slave was Pavington to Findon's sense of his duty. West had before him the paradisaical prospect of this trip in Patricia's company. His old self would have been sorely out of place, anyway, in this cheerful house. Even the large-minded Kitty would hardly have appealed to Pavington, as she did to her particular ally West, to confirm her opinion of the unbecomingness of Pat's last summer's hat. Not that he was a very good judge, for to his bedazzled eyes every appearance of Patricia's was more hopelessly bewitching than the last.

But when Patricia wondered whether the Farrellys had got their passports yet, he had presence of mind to volunteer, with an alacrity not too much repressed, to go and find out—presently. Presently meaning when Patricia had disappeared upstairs again. He was quick enough, too, to see that she understood his eagerness

to please her; perhaps even his reservation as to time. And, whether pleased or not, she was not quite indifferent.

Early in the afternoon Mr. Henry called to see Miss Pringle on business. Afterwards she gave no sign of being disturbed. If she had never had very heavy burdens to bear, at least she had always kept those she had to herself. But she had had to pass on most of the unpleasantness of this interview to Jack. And when he next appeared, his state of mind appeared also, and it was such as to darken the daylight even in Geraldstown. He only stayed to report to Miss Pringle on her car, which needed a little adjustment. But that more than a little was amiss with himself was plain for all to see.

Presently Pavington started on his way to the Farrellys'. The short way led through the yard and past the coach-house, where Jack, enveloped in profoundest gloom, was disintegrating portions of the car. At the back of his mind Pavington was worried and completely bewildered still about his cousin's agent. However, he looked in on the young man cautiously, round the edge of the door. Anyone else in that condition would best be left to solitude and silence. But he doubted whether solitude and silence under any circumstances would agree with Mr. Russell.

"You don't want to walk as far as the Farrellys'?" he suggested.

"No," said Jack.

"Oh?" said Pavington.

Jack gave a vicious twist to a nut.

"Gone and put my foot in it all right, I have," he observed. "Look here. There was a beastly blighter with ten children who came begging for help because the guards had fined him for keeping a cow on the road. Miss Pringle wanted to help him because of the beastly children. And Murphy said he was a bad egg. I thought it was a sound compromise to let him graze

the brute of a cow on the waste bit of our side of the Hill. And the beastly brute died. And he's suing Miss Pringle for damages! Now, West, would you say I could have known he'd do that?"

West could not say it.

"He's no ghost of a case." This in Jack's eyes was an aggravation. "But he'll make a heap of trouble, and let us in for the costs. Henry was here about it—furious. Said I should have known the brutal cow was going to die. I'm not a vet!" he protested indignantly. "But there are other things I've done."

Mr. Henry had taken occasion to bring to Miss Pringle's notice the fact that certain of Mr. Russell's sales and purchases for the estate had been unfortunate. He had not said in so many words that the loss involved, with the cost of the action, would cripple the estate account for the year; but he had conveyed that idea to Miss Pringle. Jack might be able to prove that it was not a correct idea. But his mistakes remained. West thought them very natural mistakes, and the only wonder that he had not made more. But Jack was cast down to depths known only to the self-assured when convicted of error in judgment.

"I can't be fit for the job," he said. "I told Miss Pringle I'd better go at the end of the quarter. She said I was engaged to stay till Lord Pavington comes back, and I couldn't leave before unless she sacked me. But that's only what she thinks, you know. There's nothing in writing—not a word. I could clear out to-morrow, so far as that goes. And the question is, Wouldn't it be better if I did? She could keep on Mackesey for a stopgap."

"This is very serious," said Pavington, greatly perturbed. "But after all it is Miss Pringle's affair, and she generally seems to have quite definite views."

"It's a question of her interests," said Jack. "That's different."

"You don't wish to leave on your own account?"

That side of the matter did not bear discussion.

"Miss Pringle's been rather too decent to me for me to let her down."

Jack wiped his greasy hands on his handkerchief, thinking with a pang what Miss Pringle would say if she saw him do it. He never objected to being scolded and looked after, having known the dignity of independence too early in life to have any illusions as to its advantages. Feeling through his pockets, he produced a worn envelope, and thrust it under his friend West's nose.

"What do you make of that?" he asked.

Pavington made out the words: 'For Findon,' scrawled shakily in his own hand.

"'For Finder,' plain enough, isn't it?" demanded Jack. "Now if you *found* the thing, what would you do? Found it laid out on the table in the waiting-room at a junction? Would you put it in the Lost Luggage office! Oh, there's nothing in it now"— Pavington was automatically looking inside—"The chit I got in it Henry has. It was a note from Lord Pavington recommending 'bearer' to Miss Pringle for her agent!"

"Undoubtedly," Pavington had to admit, "it does not look like anything but 'Finder.'"

"Well, that's how I come to be here," Jack confessed. "I had to get it off my chest to some one. I never spoke to old Pavingstones in my life. He wouldn't know me if he saw me."

"Nor you him——" began Pavington.

"I would *not* know him," the impostor asserted with heat. "After the low-down, dirty trick he played on Ardreenan! However drunk he was, he must have left this there deliberately for any scoundrel to pick up. Pretty rotten idea of a joke. I must say you wouldn't have thought it was in him. Dull old stick. Sober, honest and willing, so far as I ever heard. Sober—Lord! You'd say he was as sober as a judge. But I

suppose it was drink." Jack studied anew the wavering writing on the envelope. "One of those cases that can keep up appearances for a long time, but have to break out in the end. He certainly always kept himself to himself. I suppose he's having it out now, somewhere on the quiet, and that's why he's vanished off the face of the earth—and a good thing too."

Pavington, confounded, leant against an ancient carriage that stood back in the shadows.

"Am I to understand," he asked, "that Miss Pringle took you on the strength, only, of the paper you picked up in that envelope?"

"I hadn't another thing to show," said Jack.

"I don't wonder, then, that you feel your position—difficult."

"You may say it is!" Jack frowned heavily. "Here's another thing. Can I leave Miss Pringle depending on her precious cousin? I've never shown her that envelope. Thought at first it must be some mistake. She thinks he just dropped it around out of carelessness. I only said I'd found it."

"You told her how you came by it?"

"Well, naturally. She said not to tell people, and I haven't—except you. She wouldn't mind you, and you wouldn't give us away. I say, you will be careful, won't you, and not let out anything about old Paving-stones? He's Miss Pringle's own cousin, whatever he is, and she wouldn't like to have him the talk of the country."

"I entirely applaud your discretion," said Pavington. "You may count on me."

"Well, now you know all about it, what do you say I should do?" Jack inquired, relapsing from excitement into gloom.

"But when Miss Pringle knows all about you, and she wishes you to stay——"

"It isn't a question of her wishes," Jack reminded him. He had experience of his employer's wishes, and knew

that they were seldom related to her own advantage, and never business-like. "I became responsible for her interests when I took up that paper, and if I'm incompetent I've got to go, whether she wishes or not, and that's that."

"But what can I say?" said Pavington, profoundly disturbed. "I could not vouch for your ability, Russell, much as I might like to. I'm simply not in a position to judge. All I know for certain is, that it will spoil her trip for Miss Pringle as well as the rest of us, if you precipitate a crisis now."

The prospect of the trip, which had suffered eclipse in Jack's consciousness, shone out again in all its alluring brightness.

"Miss Pringle said, you know," Pavington pursued, "that she wouldn't undertake such a journey at her age without your—protection." He wondered at his own guile. But Patricia would be distracted if the boy were to leave Ardreenan.

Jack smiled faintly. "You think I could stand it over till after the trip?"

"I think you had much better. And—I wouldn't worry Miss Pringle with that envelope, if I were you. Not till you're quite sure there isn't some more reputable explanation."

Jack shrugged his shoulders at the idea of explanation. But he looked more cheerful.

"We'll leave it at that, then," he said. "If in the meantime you'd come round the estate with me and look into things and see what you think."

"That," said Pavington, "is the least I may do."

He left Mr. Russell much recovered. But now it was his own turn to be plunged in troubled thought. Now that the mystery surrounding that young man was cleared, there was no further reason or excuse for him to hide his own identity. He had lacked courage just now to reveal himself to the righteous Mr. Russell. But his hosts must be told. Lavinia must be told.

Everyone must know, and then how long would it be before Findon got wind of his whereabouts and haled him back to do his duty by that election? Apart from Findon, he would hate to resume his own name. With the name, he felt, his old personality would seize him—the old benumbing shyness. It would be the end of any distant chances he might have as West——. He would speak first to Mrs. Fitzgerald, a lady of great understanding and wisdom.

It was already too late to get to the Farrellys' before tea, and he bethought him that Mrs. Fitzgerald would at that moment be in the dairy and alone. The dairy was Patricia's department, and her mother had taken it over, to leave her more time for her preparations. Pavington knew the way there well, and the hour when the cream was skimmed for tea.

But it was not Mrs. Fitzgerald whom he found, busy among the milkpans with a spoon. It was his cousin, Lavinia, for even she had become infected with the spirit of bustle, which was such that no one could be happy unless doing somebody else's job. She had volunteered to help Elinor, and was very pleasantly reviving memories of childhood, when she had helped the dairymaid at home. At sound of a step she turned with self-conscious stiffness; but she relaxed on seeing who it was. She did not mind Mr. West. It might have been the Colonel, looking for his wife, who had caught her at this unusual occupation.

Pavington, seeing her full of business, would have withdrawn. But he happened to know that routine required the lifting and emptying of the heavy pans when skimmed. He must needs offer to do it. She could not be ungracious and refuse the offer. But, blind as might be her faith in the ability of even the youngest male to deal with the abstract and incomprehensible affairs that are transacted on paper, still greater was her mistrust of masculine interference in any practical matter of domestic economy. She

watched him with so intense a lack of confidence in her eye that he grew nervous under it, and slopped skim-milk over Patricia's immaculate shelves.

"There!" said Miss Pringle. "You young men are all the same. You will plunge at a thing in a hurry—and make a mess. I saw," she added, following a connection of ideas in her own mind, "that you were with Jack. Was he—talking about things?"

Mr. West fell into a grievous confusion, which Miss Pringle attributed to skim-milk.

"You have been so kind in advising him about estate matters. Jack never pretended," she said with emphasis, "to have any experience. But the fact is—I must confess—I'm afraid I have perhaps not been quite conscientious about Jack. I should like to know your opinion as a quite unbiassed person."

"Unbiassed?" questioned Pavington in his heart.

"I do not think," Miss Pringle said, with a flash of her shrewdness, "that Mr. Henry is unbiassed! But it is hard for me to judge. You see, I cannot—as Jack would say—let down Ardreenan. And, to be perfectly frank, I am afraid that when I put him in charge I was a little, well, more influenced by personal feelings than was quite right. Jack is a great comfort to me, a very great comfort. Indeed, I do not know, now, how I should get on without him. But it is not as if Ardreenan were just a matter of profit and loss. Ardreenan is a real place with real people living on it, and my first duty is to the people and the place where I was born. I must not let it be mismanaged for anyone's sake, whatever I may wish. But he is so clever and so diligent, I find it hard to believe that these things that Mr. Henry says have been done wrong are really so very serious."

"They were mistakes," owned Pavington the scrupulous.

"I know Jack considers you a great authority," said Miss Pringle in a slightly sceptical tone. "It is

wonderful to me how you managed to keep anything in your head at all, through that dreadful accident."

"I was going to say," he continued hastily, "they were not fatal mistakes."

"I thought so." Miss Pringle's face brightened with renewed confidence. "Now I must tell you I have not been very fair to Jack. I have allowed Mr. Henry and everyone to suppose that he was the agent specially chosen for me by my cousin, Pavington. Whereas he was nothing of the sort, and it was I who appointed him on my own responsibility. I told him not to tell everyone because—well, because"—in a burst of confidence—"the fact is, one's man of business, though one may have a regard for him and the greatest respect —in some circumstances he can make one's life a burden!"

Pavington felt moved to say that they could shake hands on that.

"So it is all my fault," Miss Pringle went on, "that Jack is in this false position, and that Mr. Henry expects him to know more about every little detail than he possibly could. I have told you all this because it will be such a relief to my mind if you can give me your unbiassed opinion that I am not doing wrong by Ardreenan in having the boy."

"But, dear Miss Pringle," exclaimed Pavington, again in a predicament, "I cannot give a verdict off-hand. I haven't enough to go on. It is too important a matter."

"Of course it is no question of Jack becoming my regular agent. It is purely temporary—only till my cousin returns home."

Pavington looked out of the window.

"I can say," he said, "that Russell seems to be extraordinarily capable for his time of life; that I know he is devoted to your interests, and absolutely straight."

"Of course," said Miss Pringle.

"As for experience, as far as mine is of any use, it is very much at his service. He has already suggested that I should go over things with him, if you didn't mind."

"Oh, if you will!" Miss Pringle was immensely relieved. "If it would not be too much for you! It will be perfectly all right, then. I am more than grateful, Mr. West. My mind is at ease. And now it only remains to be hoped that my cousin Pavington is enjoying himself wherever he is, and won't come back too soon! We are all so happy and comfortable as we are. At least—now will you take in this cream-jug, and I will go and speak to Jack? His present frame of mind is very depressing for everybody, and it must not continue. I will not have my trip spoilt."

Pavington went next and waylaid Mrs. Fitzgerald, to ask for a private word with her. She led the way to the dining-room, and sat down rather limply, wondering what was to come. She had not been without her private misgivings, just lately; and a while ago she had noted the manner of his offer to go on a message for Patricia. True, she had scouted the Colonel's suggestion that she should write to the Babingtons and ask who West was and where he came from. Anyone could see, she had said, *what* he was, and that he might be trusted. Still, the 'who' and the 'where from' were questions of practical importance; and till they were satisfactorily answered, and till the return of his memory was complete, she could not be perfectly certain that it was well for Patricia and Bernard West to see so much of each other.

"You haven't been to the Farrellys and back?" she began, seeing him at a hopeless loss for an opening.

No, he had not. He had been having a talk—

Mrs. Fitzgerald's heart contracted.

—with Miss Pringle, in the dairy.

She sat back, reassured.

"And Miss Pringle was saying how much she hoped

her cousin Pavington would not turn up again too soon."

"Oh, so do we all!" said Mrs. Fitzgerald.

"Nobody wants him back——"

"Nobody," agreed Mrs. Fitzgerald lightly. "And, from the impression of the good gentleman one gathers from Jack, I should say, naturally not."

"Oh, most naturally."

"Why, do you know him?"

"Oh, yes. You see, I *am* Pavington."

Mrs. Fitzgerald looked up at him at first with more solicitude than surprise.

"Are you quite sure," she said very gently and kindly, "that you are not mistaken?"

"I am afraid, quite," he answered sadly. "I can give you proofs of my identity—any amount of them! At first I really had forgotten who I was, but it came back to me. I should have told you all before, should not have stayed here under false pretences. I only hope you will all forgive me. There were reasons—and besides, it has been so very pleasant."

Mrs. Fitzgerald, looking at him attentively, understood that he was really quite clear in his mind and meant what he said.

"But," she marvelled, "you are so very unlike anything that we have heard of Lavinia's cousin! And what of your passport?"

"I got it made out in another name, because—because I was so tired of being Pavington," he tried to explain, recalling with surprise the joy with which he had arranged for the year's solitary wandering that now appeared so bleak a project. "I never expected such good fortune as I've had in coming here."

"Our good fortune too," Mrs. Fitzgerald said sincerely, all doubts being now resolved. Then she laughed. "So it was you who sent that infant to Lavinia! It was very clever of you."

"For that," Pavington owned, "I'm afraid I cannot

claim much credit. I will tell you how it came about when I have explained myself to my cousin."

"Lavinia? Oh, but you mustn't do that!" Mrs. Fitzgerald exclaimed in concern. "Not yet. She isn't thinking of the boy as a permanent fixture yet. You may just undo all the good you've done."

Pavington nodded. "I saw that from what she was saying. And, personally, I would very much prefer not to tell anyone yet but you and the Colonel. But can I go travelling with them, masquerading under a false name?"

Mrs. Fitzgerald reflected. She saw Pavington's deep reluctance to be himself again, and even had a dim perception of its cause.

"After all," she said, "it's not as if you were a commoner passing yourself off as an earl. To be an earl and pass yourself off as a commoner seems an innocent game, if you find it amusing."

"I do. I find it very amusing indeed."

Their eyes met in understanding. Mrs. Fitzgerald spoke deliberately: "If you want to keep it up, I don't see any harm."

There was a long moment's silence, while each thought of Patricia. Till Pavington became embarrassed.

"If only," he said, "Jack won't say too much about me!"

Mrs. Fitzgerald understood again, and laughed.

PART III

THE LEGAL GENTLEMEN

CHAPTER XIV

"NO BIGGER THAN A MAN'S HAND"

THIS same Tuesday afternoon, in London, the two people most concerned with Bernard Vane, Lord Pavington, of Pavington Court near Tiddon Magna, held conference in the innermost sanctum of Messrs. Findon, Harte and Barker's well-appointed office in Lincoln's Inn Fields. Mr. Findon himself, comfortably filling a commodious chair, was interviewing Symmons, the butler from Pavington Court.

Mr. Findon looked what he was—a prosperous man who deserved his ease. He had a polished, white forehead, slightly bald, and his face was pink and of the cherubic type, with no lines, but only genial curves. Kindly blue eyes that were also steady and shrewd, and the strong set of a pleasant mouth revealed the brain and dominant will that fitted him for his importance as head of his eminent firm. His immaculate and shining cleanness, the studied correctness of his attire, the very texture of his clothes inspired confidence. In Symmons' eyes he stood for all that was solid and safe, for rectitude, good heart and sound judgment.

Mr. Findon had authority to apply all the resources of Pavington Court for the benefit of the Conservative cause, and in view of the impending by-election there was much to be arranged. This was the ostensible reason for his having sent for Symmons. In reality, Symmons was much more than butler and caretaker at the Court. A confidential retainer of the old school, he had known the earl all his life, and was trusted

by him as a friend. Symmons, if anyone, could throw light on the extraordinary correspondence which Mr. Findon had been having with one Henry of Kilcashel.

Henry had written first enclosing Pavington's letter, and telling how it had been picked up in its present condition. He said that a person of the name of Russell had presented the signed recommendation mentioned therein to the writer's client, Miss Pringle, and in his client's interest he wanted to make sure that this Russell was in order.

To Findon it appeared highly improbable that between Brogsford and his port of departure Pavington had found a person by any name to whom he would have given that recommendation, tearing open his own letter of elaborate instructions and then leaving it to be thrown away on an Irish railway.

Then Henry wrote again in answer to inquiry, describing Russell as a young man entirely untrained for his position, who would appear to have been a bank clerk. This made it clear that Russell was no choice of Pavington's. How, then, had an obvious impostor come by Pavington's letter? It had not gone astray in the post, since it bore no postmark. It would be extraordinary if it had been lost, because Pavington was not a man to lose letters. It seemed to Findon that something must be very much out of order.

"Have you heard from his Lordship, sir?" Symmons was inquiring respectfully. It was a natural question, and Findon told himself it was his imagination that he heard in it a note of anxiety.

"No, I haven't," he answered testily. "No non-British posts are reliable."

He found that Symmons knew nothing of any Mr. Russell whom his Lordship would be likely to choose for a position of great trust as estate agent for a lady.

"But you do know something of the name?" he asked sharply.

" There was a letter, sir, signed J. Russell, that came for his Lordship just after he'd left. I took it by the stationery to be the class of letter I was not to trouble you with, sir. So I answered that his Lordship was abroad. It was asking for a private interview, so far as I remember."

Mr. Findon grunted in a way expressive of a desire to hear more. But the old man's head was not what it had been, and he could not recall J. Russell's address, nor the words of his communication—only that it had struck him at the time as queer and somehow not straightforward.

" Symmons," said Findon when he had ruminated for a while, " what did you mean just now by the way you asked me if I had heard from his Lordship? "

Symmons looked up startled.

" Nothing, sir. Only—I made sure you would have heard, and it's getting a long time since he left. The truth is, sir, it's been on my mind ever since, there being so much talk going round about the big lot of money he'd got to take with him——"

" What! " exclaimed Findon.

" I blame myself——" Symmons found comfort in confession. " It was the evening you came to the Court, sir, and we were busy already with arrangements for his Lordship's leaving, and I sent the footman to him with a message instead of going myself. His Lordship was counting the money, and never looked round, thinking of course it was me, and Gilbert saw. Twenty hundred-pound notes, sir! He talked in the servants' hall, and it was all over the country in no time."

" Well, well," said Mr. Findon. " No news is good news, and his Lordship can take care of himself."

Certainly, he repeated when Symmons had gone, Pavington should be able to look after himself. He was not going to worry, even though it was more than time to have heard of him.

All the same, it was a lunatic thing to carry about two thousand pounds in notes!

If he had been robbed, however, more would have been heard of it. Henry must be mistaken in his account of the agent, and Pavington had changed his mind at the last moment and personally given the young man the letter. But it was all strange, and why had he not written? Mails might be unreliable, but not Pavington, and he had had time to get to any civilised part of America and back—if nothing had happened to him on the way.

Findon groaned as he swung his swivel chair round to the table. He had not realised before what an uncomfortable amount of personal regard he had for this client whom he had known from childhood. Now, he knew, he would not be easy in his mind till he had been himself to that place in the wilds of Ireland and got to the bottom of the person of the name of Russell. He wrote a telegram to Mr. Henry, saying he would start for Kilcashel to-morrow night if an immediate interview could be arranged—Henry would know with whom.

A reply from Kilcashel came before evening, and on Wednesday night Mr. Findon crossed to Ireland, taking with him an uneasy mind and the list which he had kept of the numbers of Pavington's notes.

He reached Kilcashel on Thursday afternoon, and was met at the station by a meagre individual in a fuss, who introduced himself as Henry.

"Have you been able to arrange the interview for me?" Findon asked, proceeding down the platform at his usual leisurely gait.

"I sent for Russell to come to-morrow morning. But he's in the town now. He may be up at my place any minute."

Mr. Henry was in a fever lest their quarry should have been there and escaped. His long legs fidgetted under him like an impatient horse.

" The sooner the better," said Findon. Neither the restless Mr. Henry nor the aspect of the town inspired him with any wish to protract his stay.

Henry took his old Ford at a great speed up the back lanes. He had stopped for petrol at the garage on his way to the station, and there had caught a glimpse of Miss Pringle's car. Russell was bound to be somewhere in connection with it. Therefore, as he explained, he returned by a quiet way lest the young man should see him fetching home a stranger and grow suspicious of the interview to-morrow. Not that it was likely he would. All had been kept so dark. But he was a deep one, and they had better take no chances of his smelling a rat and having his story ready. Findon agreed. They were more likely to get at the truth if the fellow were taken by surprise.

" That's the whole thing," echoed Henry. " The surprise."

Not a bad ally in the campaign, this uncomfortable country-town attorney. He was keen and quick. Findon, being fair-minded, soon recognised that his appearance was Henry's misfortune, and that at bottom he was a well-intentioned man, concerned for his client, though naturally wounded in his professional feelings by the disregard of his advice which had landed Ardreenan in this predicament. He had, as Findon saw, no doubt at all that Miss Pringle had been imposed upon by a scamp.

Arrived at his own door, Henry learnt that Mr. Russell had not called. The whole house was full of a rich smell of cooking which would certainly have been grateful to a traveller arriving famished. Mr. Findon had lunched on the train. Always moderate in eating and drinking, he had more regard for quality than quantity, and this was an hour of the day when food in his idea did not exist. But Mrs. Henry would not be satisfied without his having tea at once after his journey. There was roast fowl and bacon and cab-

bage, and whiskey and a boiled leg of mutton, dog-in-a-blanket and much genteel conversation. From Mrs. Henry he received an impression of Russell more disturbing than what he had already.

Upstairs, afterwards, Nanny Shane provided him with a little soft water specially boiled up in a kettle with a good many grounds. She was as hospitably anxious for his comfort as the rest of the household.

"You've clean blankets anyway," she assured him. "Me and the mistress is after washing the lot. They're big ones and they wouldn't fit in the bat' without we cut them in two. But they meet in the middle, sure."

Mr. Findon went downstairs earnestly hoping that the interview might be got through, as Henry expected, that evening, and that he could start back towards civilisation before night.

Mrs. Henry presently came scowling, and beckoned her husband out of the room where he and the Londoner were concerting plans.

"Did you see Miss Pringle's car?" she asked.

"I saw it in Finn's garage."

"Well, I don't know if it's true, but by what I'm told Miss Pringle came in in it, and the two girls and Mr. West. Russell drove them straight to the station, and took the car to the garage and walked back."

"Ach, chat!" said Henry. "Where'd they all be going, when they're off for abroad next week?"

"Well, you saw the car yourself in Finn's. And they tell me the Geraldstown spring-dray was in with Mick Farrelly's mother and the youngsters and luggage. Whether it's true or not I can't tell you, but I hear they're off—the whole set-out—on the two-fifteen for Kingstown."

"Ach, woman, you're talking out of the back of your neck! Don't you know it's for next week they've their passages booked? Seven of them. Half the full of a ship. Do you think a cargo of people like that can change their minds and go off all in a minute?"

"Oh, I don't know. But the children were in on their bikes seeing them off."

Sure enough, Henry had met the younger Fitzgerald girls coming away as he drove up to the station. But at this moment Nanny brought in a note from Mr. Russell, just delivered by the man with the spring-dray.

"You'll see this is to say he's coming to-morrow as I told him," said Henry, and took the note in to the room where Mr. Findon was waiting expectantly. But when he had read it, he passed it across the table in silence. It ran:—

"—Regret I must leave Mackesey to collect any evidence you want, as we are just off to the Canaries. Miss Pringle finds it convenient to start earlier than was arranged. Enclosed please find her Canaries address, which she asks me to send you——"

"Bolted!" said Findon.

After all, it was the hunters who were taken by surprise and not the hunted.

CHAPTER XV

"THE BETTER PART OF VALOUR——"

THE sudden departure of the travellers was indeed flight.

The explanation of this strategic move was twofold, and deeply hidden from the legal gentlemen. In the first place, Mrs. Farrelly was very wroth with her son Michael when he failed to produce the letter which she had undertaken to hand over to Geraldstown, and she sent him next day to Mr. Henry to ask for it back. Mick himself, had he known of the missing enclosures, would never have placed such a compromising document in any hands but Miss Patricia's. When he learnt that Mr. Henry had already sent it to London, he became obsessed with dread and haunted Nanny's kitchen that he might get early warning of any threatening development.

Secondly, it happened that the day of Findon's interview with Symmons was Mrs. Henry's At Home day, and the Mackeseys came as in duty bound to attend it, in the car which Andy had bought to soothe his embittered spouse.

These two circumstances laid too trains, unknown to Mr. Henry, who did not know either how much of his joyful expectancy was manifest to his friends. He and Mackesey retired to smoke while the ladies spoiled Mrs. Mackesey's bold children in the parlour. A slight coolness had come between the two men since the latter had got temporary charge of Ardreenan through Mr. Russell's favour. Mr. Henry did not understand

a man with any self-respect sucking up to an enemy for the sake of paltry pickings; and Andy did not mention that the offer had been a surprise to him. It suited him admirably that his dear friend Henry should think his relations with the supplanter were part of a deep-laid scheme to get his foot in at Ardreenan in spite of all. He knew that Henry would convey that idea to Mrs. Henry, who would pass it on to Mrs. Mack, who would then respect her husband's business intelligence instead of eating him by small mouthfuls for having gone over to the enemy.

It was while they were all at tea that Findon's wire came, and Henry's exultation showed all over him.

" A man from London coming over to see me," he told his wife. " Crossing to-morrow night. We'll want to put him up here. The Fitzgerald Arms'll hardly be his style—Mr. Findon, of Findon, Harte and Barker's."

" To be sure. That's Thursday he'll arive? " Mrs. Henry said it airily, as if eminent London lawyers were an everyday affair in her house. But Anne Shane, who had brought in the telegram, stood petrified by the door.

" Isn't that Lord Pavington's solicitor? " asked Mrs. Henry, when the girl had gone.

" I believe so," her husband answered cautiously. " Anyway, there's family property that Lord Pavington has an interest in as well as Miss Pringle."

Andy excused himself when he had finished his tea. He had a little thing to see to, and would call back for the missus.

" What on earth have you to do, Andrew? " demanded his spouse.

If her blatant, direct inquisitiveness shocked Andy's sense of decorum, he gave no sign. Nor did he allow any want of confidence in the missus to appear in public.

"Mightn't I as well run down Geraldstown way when I have the car here?" he explained sweetly.

Mrs. Mackesey left the matter there. Down Geraldstown way lived one of Andrew's numerous relations who were best not mentioned—the lone old woman he had removed from the County Home and boarded out. It was a great charity, of course, and Mrs. Mackesey had nothing to say against charity. But what call had he to go visit the old creature like he did, reminding everybody that she was his father's sister, and he with his own children and their place in the world to think of? It was all of a piece with his spitting in the fire, and his fashion of cooling his tea. No wonder Mrs. Henry pitied her, handicapped with his likes. And indeed he was better out of the way of superior society.

So Andy departed unchallenged, and the new car went humming down the Geraldstown road in the moonshiny dusk, racing the evening train which bore Mick Farrelly homeward in a panic.

It happened not to be the old aunt this time that Andy went to see, but Miss Pringle at Geraldstown House. There were matters of high diplomacy connected with Ardreenan which were certainly better arranged between these two who understood each other, without the well-meaning intervention of Mr. Russell. But the real occasion of this call was something deeper. The fact was, there were parties—not to be blamed, for the best of us make mistakes, and no one was more for Ardreenan, right or wrong—but certain parties had their little prejudices against other parties. Miss Pringle was a lady on whom winks and delicate allocutions were not lost—fortunately, for of course Andy could not say in so many words that his particular ally, Henry, was brewing mischief against his more congenial enemy, young Russell; that the plot was coming to a head; and that, in some dark

way, the London lawyer was mixed up in it who was expected at Henry's on Thursday.

" You know best yourself, Miss Pringle," concluded Andy, who indeed was mystified. " Lord Pavington's lawyer, they say he is. And why wouldn't a big man from London travel to Kilcashel to see Henry? You couldn't stop the King of England doing that if he'd a mind to. But it's none of my affairs, and you know best."

Miss Pringle remained very thoughtful when Mackesey had gone. She was not struck by an inherent improbability in the theory that this important man was coming over about the Pringle property in which Pavington's poor mother had had a share. But the fact that he was Pavington's representative horrified her. What questions might he not ask about Jack! She was not aware that Henry had actually seen and carried off Pavington's authorisation. But she knew all too well she had never owned that Jack had not been sent by her cousin. If the whole affair were now exposed, it would be very difficult to keep Mr. Henry in his place. Poor Jack's position was difficult enough as it was, and this would make it impossible.

Just when they were all happy and looking forward to the trip so much! It was too provoking. Indeed, the vocabulary which had served Miss Pringle all her placid life failed to express her feelings, and she caught her tongue in the act of borrowing from Jack and saying that it was the limit.

Meanwhile, Pavington had gone on his errand to the Farrellys, and found Mrs. Farrelly scared out of her usual resignation.

" For the love of mercy, Mr. West," she said. " What'll become of Mick? There's a gentleman from London coming over on the head of that unfortunate letter——"

" What letter? " asked Pavington innocently.

" Weren't you in it and I telling Miss Patricia?

The letter he got with a bit of an old coat out of the smashed-up carriage after the accident."

An exclamation escaped Pavington, which frightened Mick's mother the more.

"The unfortunate boy gave it over to Mr. Henries in the town. It was one Hannigan that wrote it, or Parigan—some such name, to a Mr. Fenlon."

"Findon, Mother," corrected Mary Agnes. "It's a Mr. Findon that's coming to Kilcashel on Thursday."

Pavington collected himself, and comforted Mrs. Farrelly. There was an undertone of personal conviction in his assurance that it would not be Mick the strange gentleman would be down on.

It was a warm, south-windy evening, full of spring, and all the blackbirds in Geraldstown woods were singing as he followed the field-path home by the light of the moon. They sang of things more essential than ever the Conservative candidate's agent spoke about in Tiddon Magna. But these were West's affair, and the Earl of Pavington's business was with by-elections, and Findon had found him out and was coming to recall him to himself.

Findon was as fate—inexorable.

But Patricia liked people to rebel against fate. She herself would conquer fate or die. She was not of the passive kind. She in his place would laugh at Findon very kindly, and tell him to go back and look after his own old election. And Findon would go. Whereas if he, Pavington, told him to go, Findon would stay.

It was the converse of the case of Mahomet and the mountain. If Findon would not go from him, he must go from Findon, and that quickly. He would go on to Southampton and wait for the others there. It might be a little rough on the poor old chap, who would have his journey, which he would hate, for nothing. But Findon should cultivate a sense of proportion.

The real problem was—what to say to Lavinia?

A great sycamore spread its boughs, lace-like against the moon, over the end of the Geraldstown haggard-lane. There were two people standing, conspirator-like, by the gate there, and Pavington caught his breath because one of them was Patricia. The other was Miss Pringle, regally draped in a cloak.

" My dear," she was saying, " you should not be out at this time of night without something round your neck."

Patricia's neck, that was so white in the moonshine!

" We were expecting you," his cousin said to him when she saw him. And he came and stood by the gate like another conspirator, and Patricia laughed.

Her natural dignity enabled the mistress of Ardreenan to be reticent without dissimulation. Having collected her accomplices, she got to business and made no preamble.

" I think we are all equally anxious that nothing should interfere with our trip. Now I propose, if at all possible, that we get off by the Saturday steamer from Liverpool, instead of waiting for Thursday week from Southampton."

" By all means! " said Patricia. She was enjoying the mysterious flavour about this change of plan, and Miss Pringle's portentous brevity. As for Pavington, he could not believe in his luck.

" We have been talking about the Farrellys," Miss Pringle went on. " We agree it will really be kindest by them to hurry the children away."

Patricia had been for the earlier boat all along. She dreaded that Mary Agnes, given time, would fret till she was too ill to go at all. But there had been a difficulty about berths.

" Could it be managed? " She looked up at Mr. West, to become aware of his eyes fixed on her.

" If I go on ahead to Liverpool," he said. " I'll undertake to manage it."

Miss Pringle gave a deep sigh of relief.

"You are not fit to go by yourself, though," she said. "And I should not dream of allowing it. But Jack can go with you."

"Thursday," said Pavington. "At latest by the two-fifteen."

"The down-train gets in——?"

"Two thirty-five."

"That will suit quite well," Miss Pringle considered. "Patricia, if you could make Honor stop getting ready and *be* ready, I would take you girls on too, to Dublin for the night. We would have Friday for our little shoppings, and the Farrellys could go to an aunt, you think?"

"Yes. Their mother would bring them so far, to break the parting."

"Very well, then. We all start together by the two-fifteen on Thursday."

On Thursday, at the station, the people in the waiting-room made haste to rise and make way for Miss Pringle and her friends; and, for the first time in her life, it befell the lady of Ardreenan to feel that the veneration shown her by Kilcashel was misplaced. Had she not done a thing that they all would laugh at her for, if they knew? Was she not now doing what in her young days would have been called skedaddling, lest her own cousin's lawyer should find her out? She knew she should be feeling silly, instead of accepting the town's deference with a gracious air. But in fact she found herself triumphant.

Probably it was the existence of a similar feeling in Pavington which drew them so strongly together that she was moved to say that it was too much trouble to call him Mr. West, and that he would have to be Bernard for the trip.

For the other three, the unexplained precipitancy of the start added charm to the occasion; and they all

got into the two-fifteen in an exhilarated frame of mind. They might not express themselves, as did a crew of race-goers next door, by waving porter bottles out of the window and kissing hands to the station-master's wife. But, allowing for superficial differences of habit, the feelings of the two parties were probably much the same.

Pavington was not saddened by visitings of conscience, even when the down-train passed, and he caught a glimpse—a distinct glimpse at one of its windows—of a familiar profile, a glowing pink cheek, a flash of refulgent collar.

After all, was he not doing his best to follow Findon's own most often-urged advice? Though whether Findon would have advised Geraldstown as the place to go to for the future Lady Pavington was a matter open to question.

CHAPTER XVI

CROSS QUESTIONS——

MR. FINDON, in the Henry house, sat confronted with Pavington's authorisation, which was unmistakably written in Pavington's hand and no forgery.

"There can be no reasonable doubt of this being the enclosure mentioned by my client. Now, the covering letter came out of the wreckage on the railway. Russell was in that train, of course?" he assumed rather than inquired of Mr. Henry.

"Ach no, not at all," said Henry. "Russell was never in that train or near it. He didn't turn up till the end of that week."

Mr. Findon stared across the table at the other's unpleasant face in an access of horror.

"There wasn't any—loss of life in the accident?" he asked.

"Ach, none," said Henry, and his tone implied that it was regrettable. He was in a misanthropical humour, being annoyed. If the fat Englishman would only hurry, and take the risk of jumping to conclusions instead of making sure of every inch of ground before he'd put his foot down, they might be tracking up the travellers and have a chance of catching them before they sailed.

"I had not understood," Findon began with great deliberation, after a pause for thought. "Now, if Russell was not in that train, HOW DID THE LETTER COME THERE?"

Henry snorted with impatience. How did it matter in what way Providence chose to provide the means

of convicting Russell? The thing was to turn the chance to account.

"To be sure," he said, controlling himself. "It looks like there must be someone in the game besides himself."

The clock ticked away minute after precious minute while Findon considered the conclusion that Henry had come to in a breath.

"Yes, that seems the only answer," he agreed at last.

"What does it matter to us how many were in it? Russell's the only one that's troubling us."

Mr. Findon gave a non-committal grunt, and took time to feel excessively cross with Pavington. What right had Pavington, in his position, to disappear and occasion all this bother? Of course he was all right, and probably the card with his address would come to-morrow. But how had he managed to lose that letter?

"How can I make inquiries as to who was in the train?" he asked.

"You needn't go far," said Henry. "For I can tell you. The train wasn't to say wrecked. There was a bit of a mess of broken glass where one coach turned over against the embankment, and a boy I know found the pieces of a rug or a coat there, torn to rags and ground into the bank, and the letter was with it. So it could only have been the one carriage it came out of, and there were only two people in that. Come to think of it, it's queer enough, for neither of the two could have anything to do with it. There was Miss Fitzgerald of Geraldstown, and Mr. West. Whoever Russell's friend was must have got out before and forgotten his coat."

"Possible," Findon judged, "but not at all probable. This West that you speak of, who is he?"

Come to think of it, Mr. Henry had not the faintest idea.

"He's just one of the crowd they've had staying up at Geraldstown," he explained rather lamely.

"Oh? A friend of the family there."

"Well, hardly," Henry had to own. "It was out of the accident they picked him up."

"Ah! What are his antecedents?"

"Well, as to that, he hadn't any."

Findon listened with a frown to the history of Mr. West's haphazard introduction to the neighbourhood where he had risen to such high esteem.

"I've known of cases," he remarked, "where protracted loss of memory was—convenient! What kind of man is he?"

"I could hardly tell you." Henry had never taken much heed of the popular hero. "But he's not the class of man you could suspect. Isn't he going round everywhere with the Fitzgeralds since he came to himself a bit! There's not a county-house in twenty miles he hasn't been in, and they can't make enough of him."

"The social type," Findon noted.

"Then they say we may be having him engaged to Miss Percival—that's Miss Pringle's adopted niece, like. Anyway, he's a well-circumstanced man, for didn't he give a hundred pounds to a poor family at Geraldstown! Indeed, it was a son of theirs picked up that letter—"

"A coincidence," Findon agreed carelessly.

"—and brought it to me, by the devil's own luck. For the very next day he was back after it, saying the mother had promised to give it over to someone else. Well, as I was saying, West handed the mother a Bank of England note for a hundred pounds to pay her children's way to the Argentine. So you may see he's sound."

"A BANK OF ENGLAND NOTE FOR A HUNDRED POUNDS?"

" Indeed, it's long enough since Jephson at the bank saw the like."

This was all an unprofitable digression and Henry strove to get back to Russell and Ardreenan. But Findon's mind was now set on getting to the bottom of the letter, and Findon's mind was immovable. Henry in despair, to humour him, went and pounced on Mick Farrelly at the back door, and haled him in to be examined in the history of his find.

To Mick it seemed that his hour had come. The missing enclosures must be valuable, and he would be called to account for them. He could not clear himself at Nanny's expense, by swearing that the envelope had never been opened till she tore it. He went hot and cold and sullen under the stranger's inquisition, and Mr. Findon said in his heart that here was a liar.

Truth, to Findon, meant accurate statement of facts. To Mick, it meant loyalty to principles or persons. He would die before he incriminated Nanny Shane, though a coolness had lately come over their relations. He could have given some artistic version of the whole affair, which would have done very nicely for the London gentleman. But there was also Mr. Henry to be reckoned with. So hampered, he could only mumble evasive things when asked why he had held the letter so long, and then tried to get it back the day after giving it up to Mr. Henry; and about his family's acquaintance with Mr. West.

" Now, then, this won't do, you know," said Findon sternly, judging by Farrelly's abject expression that he could be bullied.

Mick, in his terror, looked to Mr. Henry for support, but only encountered a sardonic grin. Henry knew well the rabid honesty of his countrymen of the Farrelly type, and their susceptible pride; and how little satisfaction Mr. Findon would get with his

peremptory ways and his suspiciousness. Mr. Henry would have been more than human if it had not pleased him to see the swell London lawyer baffled by the simplest boy out of Geraldstown West.

It was unfortunate that the difference in their definitions of truth should lead two persons, equally right-minded and scrupulous according to their respective codes, into so complete a misunderstanding of each other as arose between Mr. Findon and Mick Farrelly. Mick deduced from the Englishman's questions that the latter, out of the malignant injustice inherent in the Saxon, was accusing him of having stolen from the letter the hundred pounds which had really been given to his mother by Miss Patricia's young gentleman. Whereas Mick's evasions inspired Mr. Findon with the suspicion that the said hundred pounds was hush-money, administered one day too late to the finder of that letter by the mysterious West. As he did not know that Farrelly was daring the unfathomable terrors of the law to shield a friend, he put down the youth's inability to make an honest confession to the cowardliness of an inferior race.

Having reached this promising point, Mr. Findon made an unusually long pause for deliberation. Mr. Henry, his latent good-nature touched at last by Mick's suffering, chose to assume that the interview was over, and swept the victim out of the room before Mr. Findon could protest. Outside, he pressed half a crown into the trembling hand, which he incidentally shook, and turned hastily back to meet the frustrated Mr. Findon, who was advancing on the door.

"He isn't gone? I hadn't finished——"

"He's gone," said Henry firmly. "If you'd said it sooner!"

"Well, he was a highly unsatisfactory witness. But I must try to find out what was the number of that note of West's."

" If that's all, Jephson of the bank'll be here, likely this evening, and it's easy ask him to let me have the number for you. He'll send round word to-morrow."

Anything to get done with this exasperating red herring, and back to Russell's trail.

CHAPTER XVII

—AND CROOKED ANSWERS

NEXT morning, Mr. Henry drove his visitor out to Ardreenan, to prosecute inquiry there. It was important to get a clue to Russell's antecedents, and he hoped that at Ardreenan the ex-bank clerk's incompetence would be manifest. It was time for Findon to realise the seriousness of the situation, and stop barking up such irrelevant trees as young Farrelly and Mr. West.

"To think what the place might be!" he lamented as they went. "If things were put up to date, and the doating old humbug of a working-steward was out of it. Grand land and lots of capital. The estate should be making a nice profit, instead of being an expense. But here we are, jogging along the same old way we've gone these fifty years. Eating money! And if you say a word to His Worship, he'll grin in your face and tell you Miss Pringle can afford to have things how she likes. He says she tells him it would be no pleasure to her to have everything upset with new contraptions, and everybody up and by the ears, and that it's time enough to change things little by little."

"There's something in that," said Findon.

"Oh, there is! When you don't know your job and want time there's a whole lot in it."

Henry's eagerness to let his colleague see the state of things took him first to the farm, and out in search of Murphy through the fields whose wet and cledgy surface inspired no enthusiasm in Findon. Murphy, in perfect peace of mind, was sowing potatoes in half

the area allotted to them by Miss Pringle's agent. He was thinking how pleasant it was to have a nice cheery young gentleman to fight with over the tillage instead of that old heart-scald out of Kilcashel. The pleasantness offset the fact that he was really conceding an appreciable fraction of an acre. He had a fatherly tolerance for Mr. Russell's foibles, and could not find it in his heart to baulk them altogether. While if it had been Mr. Henry who was wanting extra land broken out of rotation, he would not have got a drill.

When Murphy, then, beheld the attorney's loose-jointed figure striding down the headland towards him, it was as if he saw again an apparition lately laid. He felt that Mr. Russell must be lucky, like the quicken tree planted before the farmhouse door to keep off vexatious spirits, and that he should never be away.

"It's the solicitor representing Miss Pringle's cousin, Lord Pavington," Henry explained, seeking to impress Murphy. "Finding no agent here, he wants to ask you a thing or two."

"The divil he does!" said Murphy to himself, not being of an impressionable temperament.

A bunch of store cattle were happily grazing the field which Jack had condemned to the plough. They were interested in the unusual appearance of Mr. Findon, and inclined to mob him as he waited by the fence, feeling out of his element and a little undignified. He could not judge of the sex and intentions of these animals, which stared and snuffed and tried their horns on each other's quarters. He only knew that in no case could he slip between the wires of the paling as Henry had done. Moreover, he doubted the propriety of coming here at all, to pry and question subordinates, while the agent might be duly accredited for anything that they had yet proved against him. He began delicately with Murphy, when Henry brought him to the other side of the wire.

"I'm sorry to miss the agent—Mr. Russell, I believe?"

"On account of wanting to report to Lord Pavington how things are going on," prompted Henry.

"Heu-u-ugh!" said Murphy, addressing the young stock, of whom one was mumbling the tail of the stranger's coat.

"I suppose the actual—ah—farming is your department." Findon tried not to betray how much at sea he felt himself in matters of the land. "Mr. Russell does not set up, I think, to be an expert farmer?"

"Whoever told you that, sir," said Murphy, "is showing his ignorance." He raised a malevolent eye to meet the attorney's, and again looked down on the fair lea-sod that Mr. Russell would have broken for the sake of notions in books. Books, papers, leaflets on scientific farming! If it was that sort of trumpery made you an expert——

"I'll tell you what it is, sir. It's a marvel the head he has on him. There's things he knows about farming that *I* never heard tell of, and I'm fifty years on the land."

The steward faced Mr. Findon squarely, with a bovine stolidity of expression.

"The gentleman will like to see the improvements Mr. Russell has been making about the place," Henry suggested, with unconcealed sarcasm.

Murphy faced round. He pointed to the furze-grown ridge of a neighbour's holding, which was visible from where they stood.

"If you want improvements, mister, you should take the gentleman there. That's the man that was all for the latest fashion. It's two years since he set up a motor-tractor—and they sold him up last Christmas. You'll find no improvements in Ardreenan, thanks be to God."

Findon could not forbear a smile at his ally's rebuff.

It was Henry who had insisted on this visit, and perhaps it was just as well. For here was another light thrown on the matter. This steward was a fine old chap who could look you straight in the face, and the fact that he upheld the agent said more than a little in that young man's favour.

But Henry eluded defeat.

"Well, well," he said, "it's a disappointment for the gentleman to find no one here to speak to. It was sudden, too, Miss Pringle leaving when she did. Did you know they were off so soon?"

"It was sudden all right," owned Murphy, who saw here no pitfall. "It was Mr. West got them off. He was over here, Wednesday, with Mr. Russell and Andy Mack, and that was the first I heard of them going before next week."

Henry shot a significant glance at his companion. But Findon was not attending.

"Mr. West? He was arranging it?" he asked.

Henry swore under his breath. West again! Would they never get to the end of West? And indeed Findon was not satisfied till he had ascertained that West was much consulted by the agent; that in personal appearance he strongly favoured Mr. Bolger, who was the butcher in Kilcashel; and that in Mrs. Murphy's opinion he was courting Miss Fitzgerald.

When Henry finally got his colleague away, he remarked:

"Your West seems to be a gay dog. Two strings to his bow!"

"Ach!" said Henry, acutely bored. "Now, do you go into the House and get Russell's address from the servants, and I'll not show up at all. It may be better."

Having observed the Murphys' reactions to Mr. Henry, Findon agreed.

There was no pretension about Ardreenan House. It was a squat, roomy house of moderate size, with its

face to the sun and tall trees behind it for shelter. It was painted a warm, creamy white, and had an expression of its own—a tranquil, smiling expression. Mr. Findon's heart went out to all its comfortable trimness, to the smooth avenue and raked gravel sweep, the kept grass and clipped hedges and flowers in every corner. A peculiarly unlikely place, he thought, to be mixed up in anything dubious.

But the behaviour of Ardreenan belied its candid appearance. He rang till he was tired, while Henry fretted in his covert in the car, and urged him through a hole in the side-curtain to try the windows or go round to the back. Mr. Findon was almost beginning to fear that he would be compelled to adopt one of these irregular courses when a man-servant opened the door a little way distrustfully, and stood blocking the entrance. He said that Miss Pringle was abroad and the house shut up; that it was empty and no one in it knew anything at all; and that it was full of tradesmen and of the smell of wet paint, which is unwholesome.

The fact was that Mr. Henry made a tactical blunder in calling first at the farm. They had hardly left the farmhouse door to find the steward, after a slight conversation with his wife, when Mrs. Murphy ran up to the House to warn her friend, Miss Lanktree, of their approach. "That Henries" and a gentleman had been with her, looking for Himself and asking who was in charge at the House, and she had the idea they wanted to get at something about Mr. Russell.

"You wouldn't mislike the other gentleman, if it weren't for the company he keeps. That clean! You could lick him."

"The Henry one——" said Lanktree. "The Mischief sweep him! He'll be up to no good for Mr. Jack. Call himself a lawyer! The old clitherbreeches, galloping the country asking questions. He'll find

he's got to the wrong shop if he comes with his questions here."

Lanktree warned Hayden accordingly, and, having noticed that patience and the philosophic mind were not characteristic of Mr. Henry, added that he needn't hurry himself too much to open the door.

Mr. Findon was not a man easily discouraged. He effected an entrance in spite of wet paint and Hayden's contradictions, and discovered by persistent catechising that either Russell's discretion was extraordinary or the butler's inobservance was beyond belief. If the young gentleman had a home address, Miss Pringle might know it, but Hayden did not. He never remembered to have heard Mr. Russell say anything bearing on his past history or connections. He never noticed what letters Mr. Russell wrote, if he wrote any. He might have posted them himself in the town. Hayden couldn't say.

Mr. Findon did not like to press further, but it was important. He was acting for Lord Pavington, on whose recommendation Mr. Russell came. Was there anything left by Mr. Russell in his room—a book or an old envelope—showing any former address?

Hayden could not say. The housemaid was on her holiday, and the cook would not know anything. But Miss Lanktree might. He escaped, with relief, to look for her.

Lanktree did not make an immediate appearance. She went upstairs first, and locked up the Blue Room, which had been strewn with Mr. Russell's private correspondence and other effects when he went away. She herself had helped to reduce the litter to what could be covered with dust-sheets, so she knew. Next she looked down from a front window, and saw Mr. Henry's head protruding out of his hooded car like a tortoise's out of its shell, only with a different expression. She studied this pleasing phenomenon till a sound that she made in stifling her pleasure caused the

head to vanish. Then she went down to deal with Mr. Henry's accomplice.

"There might be the address in Mr. Russell's room, sure enough," she said frankly. "You wouldn't know what there mightn't be in it. But the door's locked."

"Did he lock it when he left?"

Lanktree explained that she was the lady's-maid, and knew nothing about the rooms.

"But it's locked now, fast enough, for I've just been up there; and I couldn't say where the key is."

This, she told her protestant conscience, was a strictly accurate statement. She had given Hayden the key to put in his pocket, and Hayden might be anywhere in the house by now.

Mr. Findon went away in the end without any clue, but with tenfold increased suspicions.

He had come to Ardreenan on condition of being taken afterwards to Derry Lodge, and there they went now. He wanted to inquire into the railway accident and Mr. West. It weighed on him all the time that he still had no news from Pavington.

At Derry Lodge the stout and cheerful Mary Reddy welcomed Mr. Henry as a friend. But Mr. Henry was not interested in Derry Lodge, and the failure at Ardreenan had disgusted him. After casually ascertaining that Miss Percival had given no explanation of her party's sudden change of plan, he left the Englishman to conduct his own investigations. Mr. Findon knew no reason that he could give for his curiosity respecting Mr. West, but he reckoned that five shillings would do as well. Mary certainly did her best to give him value for his money in detailed descriptions of the accident, which she had not seen, and of Mr. West, of whom she had gathered her first and most lasting impressions in a dark room. In her eyes he was a lovely gentleman, but very pale and delicate—something quite unlike the flourishing victualler of whom he reminded Murphy.

He was open-handed, cheerful, kind, no trouble in the house. He had all the virtues, and he had given Miss Honor a gramophone. He was having a hen-house put up for her too, and was to see about it himself when he came back.

"You expect him back?" Mr. Findon asked with interest.

Mary permitted herself to screw up one twinkling eye for a significant affirmation.

"He was real happy here with us, the poor fellow. You'd say he was at home. And indeed," she said tenderly, "he'd want all you could do for him. What kind of a way can he have been, wherever he came from, to say ne'er a creature came near the place nor so much as wrote to ask for him, and he maybe killed!"

"Wherever he came from? Is it really true he never gave any account of himself?"

"What's that?" said Mary, smitten with sudden deafness.

"I say, did he stay on here without explaining to Miss Percival who he was?"

"I couldn't tell you what he told Miss Percival, sir. Sure I wouldn't ask," Mary protested, with an innocence which did not deceive Mr. Findon. Her eager praise and abrupt reticence suggested to him that she had been bribed He did not understand that his criticism of a guest of the house was offensive; that he was in a country where a household is still apt to be held together by a communal spirit, so that a slur on the establishment is more fiercely resented in the kitchen than in the drawing-room. He only saw that there was nothing more to be got out of Mary.

He sought to catch Henry's eye, to make him note that the servant here had been suborned. But Henry was regulating the hall-clock, which he had once helped Honor to buy cheap at an auction.

When they were on the road again:

"Mr. Henry," he said, "your client, Miss Pringle, is I believe well off."

Henry brightened, taking pride in the great fortune which he and his father before him had helped to guard.

"Well off!" he said. "She could buy the town."

To Findon it seemed improbable that anyone would wish to acquire Kilcashel. Personally, he would give something handsome not to have it. But that did not affect the argument.

"She is wealthy, and has, I understand, no nearer relation than my friend Lord Pavington. Now, if this Miss Percival is adopted by her as a niece, it is natural to suppose that she will ultimately come in for a substantial share of the money. I don't say she will, but that it is natural to suppose she will. Would not this supposition account for an adventurer's hanging about the neighbourhood and paying court to her? Wouldn't it explain his taking trouble to get into her friends' good graces, and his going travelling with them? Of course, I don't say that West is an adventurer. I only put it forward as a hypothesis to be proved or disproved."

Henry rejected the suggestion with scorn, and afterwards became a little thoughtful. He was a business man, but if he had an altruistic weakness, it was for Honor Percival. She owed him so many good turns already. He had cracked his fingers for her when she was a toddling child, and later had touted her dogs and put her in the way of bargains. The idea of a scamp preying on her simplicity caused him an annoyance that might almost have been called chivalrous if his appearance had been more knightly. His indifference towards West began to change to dislike.

A note from Jephson awaited him at home. Jephson gave the number of the hundred-pound note for which he had been asked, and another number which was that of another note of the same value which, strange

to say, had since come in. It was young Russell who had changed the second note the day before he left.

Jack, when he procured five- and ten-pound notes for the large one that Wednesday morning, did not mention that he was doing it for his friend West, who was occupied at the moment in the post office, cabling to the Canaries. Jephson took it to be a transaction for Miss Pringle, and thought that this second note would be the one to interest Henry. He knew Miss Pringle's business methods, and that it would be quite possible for questions to arise about a hundred pounds of hers; whereas the whole country knew the history of Mr. West's gift to the Farrellys.

Mr. Jephson would have been less anxious to volunteer information if he had known what black suspicion it would cast on his young friend as well as on the princely Mr. West. Both numbers appeared in the list which Mr. Findon had in his pocket-book.

It was no longer possible for him to evade the conclusion that something untoward had befallen his friend. Pavington must have been robbed of those notes. He had not, since, written. What had become of him?

CHAPTER XVIII

FAT IN THE FIRE

"THERE are all my cards on the table," said Mr. Findon at the end of a long sitting in Mr. Henry's den. "I have told you how Lord Pavington has completely disappeared, and the grounds I have for uneasiness. You know more than I of the two men who, directly or indirectly, are implicated by their possession of those notes. Now, what do you make of it?"

"If you'd told me all this to begin with," said Henry, "we'd have saved time."

"My dear man, how could I tell you what I did not understand myself till just now?" Findon remonstrated irritably. He was realising more and more the extent of his personal feeling for his client, and it affected his temper.

"Oh, all right," said Henry. "But the end of it is, me brave pair are away on the high seas, and Miss Pringle and the two young ladies with them! If it was my man was missing, I'd cable the police in the Canaries. To be sure, we'd want to get the warrants out in this country first."

"Warrant? For their arrest? For what?" asked Findon.

"Murder," said Henry.

The wailing wind that haunted Kilcashel on its bleak hill sent a draught down the chimney and poured smoke into the room. Henry swore at the fire and poked it, and squinted over his shoulder to observe the effect of his word. But Findon sat like a cod in the chair, as Henry said to his suffering

soul, looking more impassive than ever. The host, with the red-hot poker in his hand, would have liked to apply it to his fat ally and see if that would rouse him to activity.

"Mr. Henry," he said. "From a man of your intelligence, I should have expected a more probable suggestion."

"Oh, I don't say your man's murdered. I only 'put it forward as a hypothesis.' But as to probable —well, look here. His Lordship sets off alone on a journey, and it's common knowledge that he has a big lot of cash to take with him. You have him tracked, you say, as far as Liverpool, but no further. It would be dark when he got there, and there are queer places about the docks at Liverpool. You heard of a young man answering to Russell's description being noticed at the junction. Couldn't Russell be following him, having got wind of the money? Wouldn't he have some trick to get him off to a quiet spot, and the pal, West, be waiting there with a gun, and the pair of them hold him up and clear his pockets? They wouldn't *go* for more than to rob him. But you say he's a big, powerful man, and mightn't he put up a fight? Once you start a fight in the dark, and one of the parties with a loaded revolver in his hand, there's no telling what may happen. And the river there convenient for the body. I was in Liverpool once myself, and there was a fog that would cover a thousand bodies, and you'd hardly hear a shot through it."

"We have no evidence," said Mr. Findon, "that there was a fog in Liverpool on the night in question."

"But look at what happens next," said Henry. "West has his passport for America. Likely he has his own reasons for clearing out of the country. He doesn't embark at Liverpool, though, where there'll be inquiries once his Lordship's missed, but sets off for Queenstown. Cute enough. If it wasn't for

Providence and the railway accident he'd be in the States now, and no trace left to connect him with anything. As for Russell, he's only a tool. The very sort you would pick, for no one 'd suspect him unless they knew. He's paid off with a hundred pounds and the note for Miss Pringle out of the letter, which West will have got with the money. It's safe enough for him to go to Ardreenan with it. Lord Pavington being dead, who's to prove it wasn't him sent him? "

Mr. Findon at this point gave a grunt that was almost a groan. Henry's hideous theory answered the question which had perplexed him from the first. If Russell had stolen the paper, how could he hope to escape detection long enough to make his imposture worth while? Pavington, being alive, might reappear at any moment to denounce him.

"Then look at West," continued Henry, much stimulated by the effect he had produced. "When he comes to, and finds where he's landed, you made out yourself what reason he'd have for hanging on. But would he risk it if he'd robbed a man of two thousand pounds and left him alive to give descriptions to the police? Wouldn't he clear out to the States, or, if he was afraid they'd be watching for him at the ports, he'd go and lie low somewhere where it wouldn't be known he'd come off the train that connected with the Liverpool boat that night. As to his memory—tchach! The doctor always said his head would be all right in a week. Russell was over at Derry Lodge the first thing, and I'll bet you something it was West put him up to writing to Pavington Court. When the butler wrote back that his Lordship was abroad—well, they'd know he wasn't missed yet and that they were safe for the present. They'd reckon the scent would be cold by the time he was missed. Right enough, we'd never have got on to West if you hadn't happened to handle the notes and take the numbers, and if I hadn't got that letter."

"As to the letter," said Findon. "I have no doubt West heard of Farrelly finding it, and gave him the hundred pounds to hold his tongue."

"Ach, there's nothing in that," Henry declared stoutly. "The fool he'd be to give a hundred pounds to a fellow to hold his tongue who'd do it for a florin! And Farrelly's dead honest. If he took so much as sixpence to keep his mouth shut, you wouldn't find him opening it for the hundred."

"Then what was the hundred pounds for? Why should a stranger give this particular family so large a sum, just to help their children to emigrate? Till I am satisfied on this point, I can't help suspecting West. But your theory, Mr. Henry, must have a great deal more to support it before I entertain it even as a working hypothesis."

Now Mr. Henry had never in his wildest dreams imagined that there had really been a murder. He had merely used the word as a substitute for the red-hot poker to stir up his colleague withal. But when he found that man of cautious judgment prepared to entertain the theory on any terms, he began to think there must be something in it. It was true he could construct no alternative that fitted all the facts so neatly.

The next week found Mr. Findon still in Kilcashel, though he had removed himself to the 'Fitzgerald Arms.' Too acutely anxious to leave the whole inquiry in Henry's hands, he was following up Russell himself on the pretext of acting for Miss Pringle's cousin. Stumbling at every unguided step over mysterious conventions and hidden bonds of honour, he derived less information and caused more scandal and offence than anyone who knew him in London would have thought he could compass anywhere. He was inextricably tangled in a net of suspicion before the end of the week, and ready to believe the worst of everything.

The first straightforward story that he elicited was from Mrs. Farrelly, and he decided that she was not

in the plot. She described the flurry of the travellers' sudden departure from Geraldstown immediately after the evening when she was speaking to Mr. West about the letter now in question. She said they had all been in a queer fright when Mick gave that letter to Mr. Henry, and Mr. West himself seemed to get quite a turn when he heard there should be a gentleman from London coming over about it.

While Mr. Findon was confirming his suspicions at the Farrellys', Mr. Henry went by himself to Derry Lodge. He explained to Mary Reddy that the gentleman with him the other day was Mr. West's uncle, only just home from the West Indies and anxious for news of his nephew. Was it true that none of Mr. West's other relations had written to him, and had he not written to them, and was he really so queer in the head after the accident?

Mary was only delighted to answer such natural questions. She had always been scandalised at the callousness of poor Mr. West's belongings, and had never taken his want of memory seriously.

"Though, to be sure, there was one queer thing he did."

Henry learnt something more than he had expected, and went away in a state of considerable excitement.

He laid before his ally, as soon as the latter returned from the Farrellys', a damp handkerchief fresh from the washtub.

"What's that?" he said.

Mr. Findon turned it over and unfolded it, as was his wont, before committing himself to an opinion.

"Pavington's! Where did you get it?" he exclaimed when he had found the mark.

"Mary Reddy got it. At least the little girl she has keeping her company found it, where only a kid would come on it, hidden away in a hole behind the skirting-board in West's room at Derry Lodge. Mary'd washed it. *It was all blood.*"

Findon dropped it. The two men sat and looked at each other.

"Mr. Henry," said Findon, "this is ridiculous. Is it reasonable to think that any man who had—who was guilty of foul play—do you suppose he would carry a thing like that away with him?"

"Oh, it wouldn't be a reasonable thing for him to do. But, look here, Mr. Findon, supposing you'd gone out to rob a man and got let in for murdering him, would you be feeling so reasonable, after? Do you say you'd stand there and your man dead at your feet, and you expecting footsteps every minute—you'd stop and pick over what you'd got off him? You'd be a cool hand, Mr. Findon! I'd never think of what I had till I'd got clear. Anyway, will you answer me this: How did Lord Pavington's handkerchief come in West's room? And why was he in such a hurry to hide it, he couldn't wait till he was up and about and could bury or burn it?"

Mr. Findon's mind was not constructive, and he could not answer.

Mr. Henry did not confide unreservedly in his wife. Still, they were in the main allies, and anyway it was impracticable to hide everything from her beady brown eyes. Especially it was difficult to hide that part of an intensely interesting investigation which was being conducted by Mr. Findon in his own manner. By the end of the week Mrs. Henry had communications to make to her confidante, Mrs. Mackesey, of so important a nature that Mrs. Mackesey got home late for her husband's tea and the children's bed-time. When she did come in, unable to contain her excitement, she hardly noticed that Andy had his tea in the saucer with his usual lack of gentility, and was sharing sup about with the two-year-old child on his knee.

"You've heard of Lord Pavington?" she cried.

"Amn't I sick hearing of him?" answered Andy. His friend Henry had long since come to the conclusion that poor Miss Pringle would never have dreamt of going behind his advice if her interfering cousin had let her alone.

"He's murdered."

"You don't say!" said Andy, horrified for Miss Pringle's sake.

Seeing his attention distracted, Mrs. Mackesey took away the child and kissed its jam-covered face with maternal devotion.

"My duckie lamb!" she murmured, as to an injured innocent whose cause a just heaven was avenging. "Andrew, this is a fearful thing. The poor lord was held up for his money and made away with, by SOMEBODY, before ever he sailed for abroad. AND THERE'S A WARRANT OUT AGAINST YOUNG RUSSELL. That's the facts, and you can think what you like."

Andy thought this part of the news highly entertaining. He had been following with appreciation the great London lawyer's quest for traces of malpractice in Mr. Russell's record. This was the crown of the comedy.

Next evening he drove down to the town, and stopped for a neighbourly crack with the sergeant of the Civic Guard. The sergeant had been strictly charged by Henry, who was Peace Commissioner, to keep his head shut about both the warrants just issued. The sergeant, being a sober-minded man, averse to scandal, would not have talked in any case. But when Mr. Henry's particular friend strolled in, alluding darkly to the Russell affair as if he were in the know, it was natural to assume that he did know; and Sergeant Dunne, though he said nothing, did not trouble to keep understanding out of his eye. Thus was betrayed one-half of Henry's plot, whereas the implication of West remained unsuspected.

Andy, leaving the barracks, headed his car down

the Geraldstown road. The joke, he considered, had gone far enough. It might make disagreeableness for Miss Pringle when she came home, and Henry would be doing himself no good either. It was time Colonel Fitzgerald was put up to the capers those law ones were carrying on with, the way he could regulate them. The Colonel was the man of most sense and authority in Andy's ken, and he knew very well that Henry had avoided Geraldstown House with care. Even Henry could harbour no illusion as to the side the Fitzgeralds would take in the case, and he had too much discretion to stir up such formidable opponents prematurely.

The Colonel, thought Andy, was the man to know how to sort the whole damn-foolishness.

But the Colonel was away with his wife on a visit to her people, and not expected back before Miss Patricia's return from abroad.

"And where'll me playboys have landed up by that time?" Mr. Mackesey questioned his prophetic soul as he went away.

He alluded to the two legal gentlemen, and he could not forbear calling at the Henry house on his way home to see how they were getting on. He found them closeted in the back room and absorbed in certain cable-forms, which Henry gathered together and laid face downward on his friend's entrance.

This indefinable friend of the house, who used the native idiom with a faint American twang, Mr. Findon had already met and liked, perceiving in him an ampler spirit than Henry's, and a sense of cleanliness. He would have called Mackesey into council, but Henry frowned a negative to his questioning glance, and he deferred to the attorney's local knowledge, as he consistently did when it would have been better to have followed his own judgment.

"Yous are busy," said Andy. "And I'll not disturb."

Henry did not contradict him, and he withdrew with an expressionless face.

"I should have thought," said Findon, "that one might at least have asked him for a personal description of West."

"Haven't you a dozen descriptions of West?"

"I have. At least a dozen. All different. I would like something authentic for the detective. However, as I was saying, I shall be in London to-morrow, and will as soon as possible despatch the best man I can get. There may be some delay before I find one competent to work in those parts——"

"Ach!" said Henry.

"Mr. Henry!" said Findon. Findon did not bear trouble with perfect outward dignity. He resented trouble, and it made him peevish. "Do you imagine that I am less concerned in this matter than you?"

"I'm not wasting my time imagining anything," Henry rejoined, with more heat than truth. For he was imagining vividly the effect on public opinion in Kilcashel if harm befell any of the three ladies and it became known that he could have warned them against their escort and had failed to do it. He would have told Miss Pringle—he thought—of the discovery of Pavington's letter if he had not been waiting for Findon. It was not his fault, and he would be blamed, and it was an unjust world.

Findon, for his part, forgave Mr. Henry for his precipitate action about the warrants. He had cabled to the Canaries, and learnt that the party had never arrived there. Now he discovered, through the shipping company, that they had left the ship unexpectedly in detachments at different Spanish and Portuguese ports.

No longer could he have a reasonable doubt that West and Russell were guilty men, and were using the ladies for a blind to cover their escape. That same night he was going back to London to set a detective on their track.

PART IV

MISS PRINGLE'S TRIP

CHAPTER XIX

GOING FURTHER——

THE *Orsina* ran into sunshine south of Finisterre, and the mountainous coast of Spain lay like a bluer cloud on the blue sea. It was fine weather in every sense for the travellers from Kilcashel. Mary Agnes was better already, and carrying on a dozen flirtations at once, as was only right, among the stewards and crew. Even the forlorn Peter Farrelly found comfort in the ship's cat. And Miss Pringle's party, thanks to Jack, was the pivot of life in the saloon.

To Patricia, looking down from the upper deck on the round of shining sea of which the ship was the centre, it felt as if they were all afloat in a dream. They were so disconnected with ordinary, material reality and the cares of every-day. And the *Orsina* seemed under a spell, so that nothing could go wrong in her. It was little, fragile Mary Agnes who had supported her companions through terrors of fog in the Bay. She had won friends for herself who would look after her and her brother for the rest of the voyage, so there need be no more anxiety on their account. Patricia was perfectly aware of the understanding which had grown between herself and Bernard West through these idle days. She wondered whether it was perhaps because she was so very happy that she could see nothing anywhere but sunshine.

Pavington, for his part, found himself sufficiently encouraged to dare to begin a long letter to Findon, of explanation and of humble apology. There would just be time, at Vigo, to land and post letters.

Vigo Bay wound into the very heart of the steep blue mountains that broke into coloured rocks at a close approach. Vigo town, climbing precipitous hills by terraces from the water's edge, was red-roofed, cream-washed and green-shuttered—a South European town such as Miss Pringle had read of and imagined all her life, and never thought of seeing in actuality. It was already a southern sun that glowed on amber and maroon and russet sails in the bay; and boats came out to the steamer, laden with piled oranges and cherries. Others brought native pottery, grey-white, with bright, rough patterns. To fish over the ship's side with a coin, a basket and a string, and draw up a crock or a plate, was a sport with which Honor had no sympathy. She said: What about packing the things? But Miss Pringle and Patricia could hardly have torn themselves away but for the shortness of the time they would have on shore. The *Orsina* was late already, having been delayed by fog.

The first landing on foreign soil was in itself, perhaps, a livelier joy for Miss Pringle than for any of the others, since two of them were distracted in their minds with thinking of each other, and Jack thought that the purser had done them in Spanish money, and Honor very seldom thought at all. Neither Honor nor Jack was concerned to see whether there were traces of Moorish influence in the architecture of Vigo. They thought it would be better to find the post office and send off the letters. Accordingly, they went off together, highly entertained to be in a country that called its post *correos*.

Pavington, whose letter to Findon was not ready, said that they would lose themselves and not find the *correos*, and that they would come back late for the tender and be left behind. Whereto they rejoined that, as they did not think they knew the language, they would not get misdirected. Pavington had learnt a little Spanish with a view to South America,

and he remembered some Portuguese from the time of the War, when he had had to do with the Portuguese army in England. His linguistic ability impressed Honor and Jack, and they felt it their duty to see that he should not suffer from undue vanity on account of it.

Being provided with Baedeker's map, they found their way simply enough, and would probably have got back without difficulty had they walked. But Jack, finding they had forty minutes still in hand, and not being allowed by Honor to spend his pesetas on anything that would have to be packed, engaged a two-horse carriage, whose harness was of a strange fashion and great antiquity, so that they might see how long it would be before team and carriage parted company.

The moderate pace at which the machine progressed could not, however, be said to afford a fair trial. Their suggestions to the driver that he should drive faster were interpreted by him as leave to take the longer way round. After half an hour it was clear that if they were to reach the harbour in time they must abandon the carriage and revert to speedier locomotion on foot. By this time they were involved in the back-alleys of Vigo, of which ninety-nine per cent. were blind, according to Jack's calculation. In these alleys women sat on their doorsteps preparing strange forms of food, which had a horrible fascination for Honor. She was not seriously concerned about the hour, for—she said—the others would be there and could keep the boat till they came. She was not experienced in the inhuman ways of countries other than her own. It was the greatest shock of her life, when they reached the quay three-quarters of an hour late, to find that the steamer had sailed.

The thrifty-minded Jack had only changed a small amount of money, considering the purser's pesetas a bad bargain, and he had persuaded Honor against having any. Their joint resources, after the driver

had been satisfied, amounted to three and fourpence-worth of Spanish money and an English half-crown. They stood on the quay and looked at each other, and Jack laughed.

There was nothing to be said, and at the moment, as it seemed to Honor, nothing to be done. She had never in her life before found herself in a situation where she was completely at a loss and helpless, and it was to her an extraordinarily disagreeable experience. She could not even have the comfort of blaming Jack, since her honesty forced her to own that it was at least as much her fault as his. Added to it all, the unaccustomed heat and glare had made her dizzy, and it was a long time since lunch.

"What about tea?" said Jack.

"What about your granny!" said Honor. "When that's all we have to get home on." She indicated the funds in his hand.

Hunger stimulated Jack's naturally quick wits.

"After all," he said, "they can telegraph us money from Oporto. The boat's due there to-morrow morning. We'll have to put up somewhere meanwhile, and I vote we look up a decent hotel now, and get them to put our tea in the bill."

Honor began to forgive Jack for having laughed. These possibilities had not occurred to her.

"But what's the Spanish for bill? We don't even know that," she reminded him.

"Billo," said Jack without hesitation.

"And how can they send us money when they don't know our address?"

"We'll have to wire it to them to the ship at Oporto. We've cash enough in hand for that, which is just as lucky."

"But we've got to have an address before we can wire it, and what decent hotel will take us in without any luggage?"

Jack had not realised their lack of luggage.

"Now, if you'd let me get the soup-tureen for Miss Pringle we'd have had that," he said.

Honor became annoyed again. Their plight might not be as desperate as she had thought at first, but still it was no case for levity. All the same, in spite of herself, she began to feel a certain confidence in her companion's resources.

As it turned out, the hotel which they favoured had a hall-porter who spoke French. Jack had not forgotten all that he had learnt at school, and though his was English French, and the porter's the Spanish variety, and the two forms did not very closely correspond, still there were three or four words in the vocabulary of each which the other recognised, and at any rate tea was forthcoming.

Jack agreed with Honor that, before launching forth the telegram on which everything depended, it would be well to turn up some one who spoke English.

"So that we can find out how much money we'll want to get on by rail to Lisbon, where we're sure to catch up the old *Orsina*. That shipping-agent chap who came out on the tender would do, if we can find him."

So, after tea they scoured the purlieus of the harbour till they found the shipping-agent's office. The Spaniard in charge spoke as much English as anyone could desire—more to the minute than made for intelligibility. But Jack could follow him here and there, and there appeared—joyful sight—a letter addressed in Mr. West's somewhat illegible hand, which had come with the pilot off the departing *Orsina*.

West enclosed one of his useful English notes, with a few hastily scribbled lines, reminding the marooned ones that he had told them what would happen, and instructing them to take the train this evening for Oporto. According to the pilot, the through-train would get them there in the small hours, in ample time for the boat, which was due to arrive in the

middle of the morning and to sail again at noon. They were to go to the Paris Hotel, and stay there till called for. He added: "In case you shouldn't get this in time to catch the train, we will take all the luggage provisionally off the boat, and if we do not find you at the Paris, wait there till you come along."

"Silly ass!" said Jack. "Plunging off like that. Why can't they sit tight and leave us to find our own way and catch up? Does he think we're idiots?"

"He won't be far out if he does," said Honor.

She was reassured to find that the pilot had also conveyed two small hand cases, labelled by Patricia. It felt more like respectable travelling to have luggage, even if only an inconspicuous amount, and Patricia had a genius for fitting essentials into small compass.

The agent changed the English note with great affability, though it unsettled his ideas to find that the agreeable young *inglese* knew the legitimate rate of exchange, and would not go for very much less. But he made a reasonable profit on some semi-decomposed Portuguese paper money, which he happened to have on hand, and which it was convenient to the travellers to take for the latter half of their journey. He also had a railway guide, and explained something about it with an accelerated volubility that confounded even Jack. The time-table, however, spoke for itself to the effect that they had seventeen minutes to catch their train in, and that there would not be another till next morning. They therefore fled, and left the agent still explaining excitedly to the empty air.

They had to go to the hotel to pay for their tea, which left them so little time that they decided to hail a motor from a stand near by, and get the hall-porter to tell the driver where they wanted to go. The porter readily expounded what he thought they wanted; but it was probably something different from what they thought themselves, for it was only after some forever inexplicable circumlocutions that

they arrived at a station in time to see the vanishing tail of the Oporto express.

" Our luck! " said Jack. " Now we'll miss the boat at Oporto, and they'll all have waited for us, and have to take tickets to Lisbon, and lose that much of their passages as well as us."

" And Aunt Vinie'll die of fuss," said Honor.

It was a chastened and crestfallen pair that left the station. In the street outside Jack stopped and looked in Baedeker.

" I'm thinking," he said.

Honor had just spirit enough left to express surprise. But when he demonstrated his idea on the map, she approved of it.

" You see, it's barely twenty miles by road to this place that one couldn't pronounce on the frontier of Portugal, and only about the same distance on to the first Portuguese town, Viana do Castelo. If we took a car, we should do it in a couple of hours, and we'd surely pick up an early local train there that would get us to Oporto in time. Of course the car would cost a lot more than rail, but then it would save all our travelling to Lisbon, so it would be well worth it."

Honor was as eager as he for any chance to retrieve their bungling. The car that had brought them from the hotel was still there, and Jack showed the man on the map where they wanted to go, and made a bargain.

" It's really not so much for forty miles," he said in some surprise when he could beat the man down no further.

It was broad daylight still, and a car on the open road in a strange country was enough to lighten even Honor's pessimism. They skirted olive groves, and passed outlandish farmsteads set about with lemon-trees, and climbed stretches of arid mountain. This was in Spain.

" What was it that creature in the shipping-office was trying to tell us about Portugal? " said Honor presently.

"Ask me another," said Jack. "But, whatever it was, he was saying it was just as usual, so I don't see what there is to get excited over."

Honor knew foreigners to be easily excitable, but she was left with a vague foreboding.

The road wound in and out and up and down, and made a longer way of it than Jack had measured on the map. He had not reckoned, either, with the rapid fall of night in southerly latitudes. They saw the sun through a cleft in the hills, dipping to the Atlantic. Then, hardly had they climbed and twisted out of the cleft and over a desolate pass, before it was dark. They could but dimly see a village which was plainly perceptible to the olfactory organs, when the car stopped and the driver made as if this were the end of the journey.

"Here, this isn't Viana," Jack remonstrated in English.

"I don't get out of the car," said Honor. "Not in this place."

The driver said many things, and agitated himself over Honor's refusal to alight. He illustrated his meaning with gestures. A small crowd of villagers collected, and he appealed to them for corroboration. They all shouted and gesticulated in the dusk, and the more they did it, the less would Honor get out.

"He says it's the Portuguese frontier," Jack interpreted, at last identifying the name of the place he would not himself have pronounced. "He says it's all gravy on the other side, and he can't go on."

"Nonsense," said Honor.

But the man would not go on, and the crowd appeared to consider him in the right.

"I think he's trying to make out he only contracted to take us as far as this. That's why we thought the charge was cheap! He says there's a good hotel."

Honor was not surprised. She expected nothing from foreigners but brazen lies.

"If he can't take us on, he may take us back to Vigo. We'll stop the night there, and go on by train in the morning. There's no chance now of getting to Oporto in time."

"But," said Jack, "we'll have to pay the beggar. And if we go back to Vigo, we'll be as we were, and all that money clean wasted."

Honor had no sense of value in anything but sterling. But when Jack worked out the cost of their drive in pounds, shillings and pence, she saw the force of his argument.

"If there really is a hotel here," he contended, "it'll be sure to be cheaper than Vigo, and we'd be saving something on the bill towards the difference in travelling. And we'll pick up the morning train here, safe enough, for it's bound to stop at the frontier for customs."

"Well, don't pay the blackguard till we've seen his hotel," she said reluctantly; and got out of the car, to the manifest relief of the driver and the sympathetic crowd. She came to a halt again when the way to the hotel was indicated, up a side-court, black as Erebus and smelling powerfully. Even the light-hearted Jack was a little daunted.

"We'll not have our throats cut, though," he assured her with the beautiful confidence of his race. "Too near Vigo and a British consul."

Honor was not thinking of having her throat cut. She could face any clean danger. But she feared fleas—or worse—and did not see that the British consulate in Vigo was any great protection. She had to gather all her spirit to explore the noisome passage in whose darkest abyss the hotel door opened.

Within, a ladder-stair, much worn and dangerous to life and limb, led straight up from the threshold. The stables obviously occupied the ground floor. But, belying all auguries, the lighted landing above was fragrant of yellow soap, and both the host and the

rooms showed every sign of decency. Honor was greatly comforted.

The trouble began when she realised that all the rooms led out of one another, and there were no corridors. If she made up her mind to stay, and suffered Jack to pay and dismiss the car, it was in no such spirit of high adventure as is popularly credited to youth, but because the tariff was cheap.

Her room was a slip off the landlady's own. The bed was a plank frame with one large and one little sack stuffed with straw for mattress and pillow. There were hand-woven sheets, whose coarse grain revolted her; and country blankets, all dark and crimson and orange stripes, which inspired her with a homesick longing for the fleecy coverings of her own bed at home, that came from the Kilcashel mill, and had only two neat lines of natural brown-sheep colour to diversify their whiteness.

Jack reported that his quarters were fine, with a tin jug and basin and nearly a pint of water; and they told him it was a very gentle *caballero* who had the outside room, and that he was away on a visit to the public-house, and likely to be out some time.

After supper Honor's temper improved, and she was able to rally Jack quite genially on the speed with which he had arrived at being able to translate Spanish.

"Rather," said he. "Necessity, you know."

"Thought so!" said Honor, completing the appropriate proverb.

Jack, the easily amused, laughed till he was hard set to save his dignity and the equilibrium of his chair when the waiter came in to clear the table. He unfolded West's letter to screen his face.

"What a beastly claw he writes!" he observed. "Funny thing, his fist reminds me awfully—— Oh, Lord!"

"What?"

"I was going to say something I mustn't."

Honor was accustomed to Jack's manner of keeping secrets.

"You'd better think about something else, then," she advised, "as you mostly think outside your head instead of in it. What about finding out what time our train is to-morrow?"

This was a serious matter. Jack applied to the waiter, and the waiter appealed to the landlord, and the landlord fell back on his wife. In the end Jack drew a picture of a train on the back of West's letter, and said "Puff-puff," and light broke on the hotel staff, now reinforced by the housemaid and several children.

"What do they say?" asked Honor.

"Gravy," said Jack. "They say there was a train to-day, but there'll be gravy to-morrow. I'm getting fed up with gravy."

Mr. Russell's linguistic attainments were not sufficient for him to recognise *grève*—the French for 'strike,' pronounced phonetically according to Hispano-Portuguese ideas. But it was clear to him that it meant there would be no train into Portugal to-morrow.

"Something wrong with the rotten line," he opined. "Looks as if we'd just have to take another car on!"

"Ask about another car, then."

He drew the required article several times over on the envelope, till the assembled company realised what it was.

"*Automauvais!*" they exclaimed then, delighted.

"*Mauvaish*—bad," Jack translated. "I daresay it is a bad picture, but I didn't ask your opinions about it. I only wanted to know where we can get one of these things?"

"*Grève*," said the company in chorus. "*Todo, todo grève.*"

"Confound the gravy!" said Jack. The significance of the ominous word was beginning to dawn on him. He put his hands in his pockets and whistled a despairing note.

"Look here, Honor. All the transport in rotten little Portugal's on strike, and we're going to have to put our tails between our legs and beat it back to Vigo on the train."

Honor sat up.

"We are not!" she said. "Go back to Vigo, indeed, after all we've done! Your Viana place is only twenty miles on. We'll walk."

"But if it's still all gravy when we get to Viana?"

"We'll go on walking."

"But it's some way to Oporto."

"Well, it's not as if we had so much luggage to carry. We wouldn't get there quicker, anyway, by taking a train in the opposite direction."

"That's true." Jack looked at Honor, and saw that she meant what she said—as indeed she usually did. "Good for you! We'll do it," he agreed with enthusiasm.

"Vigo?" inquired the sympathetic household.

"No. No Vigo. Not much. Viana, Oporto, this way." Jack got up, slung a napkin over his shoulder and tramped up and down the restricted space between the table and the wall.

"If you make them think we're quite mad," said Honor, "they'll probably turn us out."

But they were kindly people, and only concerned. They exclaimed among themselves, and then the waiter had an inspiration. He stated it at length in Spanish-Portuguese patois, but Jack could only shake his head.

"Here, draw it," he said at last, pushing over the paper and pencil.

The waiter indicated that he could more easily show it, if they would follow him. Nothing loath, they rose and followed down the ladder-stair and out into the malodorous darkness of a labyrinth of alleys.

"Don't get lost," said Jack.

"Get lost yourself!" retorted Honor. But she did

not resent his protective tone, nor even his fingers on her sleeve, as she would have done the day before. It was only a moment till their eyes were accustomed to the night. But it was a moment long enough to mark the end of the puppy stage for boy and girl, and the beginning of a new dispensation.

A lighted doorway glowed out after a few turnings. There emanated from it fumes of sour wine, with a cheerful sound of clinking and snatches of a sentimental song. The light struck upwards, and showed a leafy branch hung over the lintel.

"The pub, by gum!" said Jack, though he knew nothing of the traditional sign of the bush.

Their guide waved to them to wait outside while he went in. He presently returned with another man, whom he led by the elbow. The other wore a long three-caped coat cloakwise over his shoulder, and a wide-brimmed black felt hat effectively tilted on the back of his head.

"*Caballero portuguese*," said the waiter, presenting him.

"My gentle caballero, for a cert," said Jack. "Delighted to meet." He extended his hand.

But the Portuguese gentleman only made hostile demonstrations, which were prevented from developing seriously by a want of co-ordination in his legs. When he desisted, to join in the chorus of the mournful song, he was turned round and supported back into the wine-shop by the waiter, who came out again with an air of achievement after a few minutes' parley.

"So it's all fixed up and O.K., whatever it is?" said Jack.

The waiter signified that it was. What the arrangement was to which he had committed them with his inebriated friend he could not explain in any detail. But they did not greatly care. Jack was too much exhilarated, and Honor too deeply bewildered, and the face of everything had been changed by a touch in the dark.

CHAPTER XX

——AND FARING WORSE

BETIMES next morning the housemaid brought Honor her early breakfast. Through the door she beheld the landlord, the landlady and all their children peacefully slumbering in one large bed in the next room. She lost no time in making ready to leave.

It was not much later when the waiter led the two travellers out through the morning mists to a stable-yard on the outskirts of the village. Here they found the Portuguese *caballero*, and also a high, four-wheeled cart with three brindled mules harnessed abreast.

"So that's the idea?" said Jack. "Jolly fine one, too." And he slapped the waiter on the back.

It was better than they could have hoped. The owner of the conveyance had somewhat recovered from his overnight celebrations, and was full of urbanity. He disposed their inconsiderable luggage in the back of the cart with bulkier freight of his own, and they took their places on the seat in front in the highest spirits.

The sun was shimmering through thinning mists, the hill-country before them revealed itself by exciting glimpses, and all the world was fresh. Their conductor did not even do anything so commonplace as follow a road. He drove through sparse pine-woods by a track consisting of a pair of deep ruts, whose gauge was too narrow for the mule-cart, so that when the near wheels were in one rut the off wheels were running high, through heather and over pine-roots, while the vehicle careened and the occupants tended to slide off the end of their seat. The sensation had a charm of novelty for the

strangers, which it hardly could have for their driver. Yet he also seemed amused; and when at last they broke out of the woods into the open road, he chuckled, and, after looking back along the road, pointed to the ground beneath them and said that it was Portugal.

He said it with every sign of pride. Yet the surface indicated did not seem in itself to be a thing to be proud of. The high-road to Viana was nothing but a wide clearing through the woods, with a floor of red earth which the traffic of all the years since the overthrow of the monarchy had ploughed into ridges and trenches, interspersed with pools and rocks. The cart laboured like a ship in a heavy sea, and conversation was difficult even for Jack.

"But how," he found breath to say, "if this is Portugal, how did we get here without any customs at the frontier, or anyone looking at our passports?"

Honor had never thought of a frontier as anything but a black line on a map. It had not struck her as remarkable that they should have crossed one without being aware of it.

"Tell you what it is," said Jack, when the going was easier for a moment. "Our gentle friend has been taking advantage of this strike and nobody looking out for wheeled traffic, and done a little smuggling trip on his own. Hope he's got clear all right and we shan't be all run in! It wouldn't be very respectable."

"If they wanted passports at the frontier," said Honor, "perhaps it's just as well. I haven't got mine."

"You—what?"

"Left it packed up in my cabin. Mr. West said we'd only want landing permits for Vigo, so I left it back for fear I'd lose it."

"Gosh!!" said Jack.

They had stopped before a wayside house, where there were a couple of mules tied up, their pack-saddles draped with stripy blankets like those which had offended Honor so much on her bed. There was a dry

bush over the door, and the *caballero* dismounted and went in.

He came out refreshed and very conversational. Long practice, presumably, and the *abandon* of the semi-drunk, enabled him to keep his balance and his breath without effort while flogging the team to a gallop. He leaned forward and faced round to his companions, swaying and talking. He lashed the mules without looking at them or regarding the so-called road, which wound downhill. He flourished the loose reins in his other hand.

"Surefooted beasts—mules," said Jack by jerks.

Honor craned over the dashboard at her imminent peril.

"Tyre's coming off the hind wheel, this side," she remarked.

"Should think it was the other side too," said Jack.

By the exercise of some gymnastic skill, he retrieved their two small cases from the midst of the bounding contraband on the floor of the cart, and held on to them. The pace increased as the hill grew steeper. There was a sharp bend in the road. A mounted man happened to come round it, and they would have run into him but that the mules swung off. Taking advantage of the freedom of their heads, they bolted up a branch-track and stopped, panting.

"That was worth coming abroad for," said Honor, when she had recovered her breath. Excitement was a rare sensation with her, and she enjoyed it when she got it.

Rapid travelling through the fresh air had sobered their jehu. He let the mules stand, and hailed the equestrian, whose opportune appearance had probably saved them from disaster at the turn. The man rode up, little but the head and legs of his pony visible under a great saddle like a carapace, which ended in a horn that curved so that its point should support the small of the rider's back. His feet were planted in hanging receptacles of the shape of a coal-scuttle by way of

stirrups, and he carried a three-decker coat and a cotton umbrella over his knees. The owner of the cart made inquiries of him, evidently referring to the road ahead. The answers seemed to be unsatisfactory; and the *caballero* made signs to his passengers to get out, which they did, Jack with their whole luggage in one hand.

" It's about time you did have a look at your tyres, old boy," he observed.

But the *caballero* took no heed of his wheels. He swept off his hat, pointed with it down the road, gave a valedictory flourish and whipped up his team. He drove off up the by-way at a canter, leaving his late passengers gaping at the dust of his departure.

" Well, he made good time while he lasted," said Jack philosophically. " We must be four or five miles on our way, and we're rather likelier to get to Viana right side up on our own feet."

The horseman confirmed the indication given that they must keep to the main road. So they resumed their journey on foot. Round the bend a village came in sight, which relieved Jack, who was wondering where they could buy provisions for lunch.

There were some dozen men in a knot drifting about the entrance of the one unsavoury street which constituted the village. They looked uneasy and ready for mischief.

" Strike picket, you bet," Jack pronounced. " That's why the *caballero* did a bunk."

They found a provision shop further on, with odoriferous sheets of dried fish hanging outside, and pale green, greasy cakes of cheese, gelatinous in consistency, in the window, both commodities plentifully sprinkled with flies. More attractive were the golden-brown rings of bread a foot and a half in diameter. But when they ventured inside to investigate these, Honor recognised that they were made of maize, and rejected them with her country's traditional horror of " yalla meal." However, she graciously sanctioned the

purchase of oranges and dark-grey rye bread. And finally Jack must needs get a dollop of the cheese, because he said it looked like frog-spawn, which he had always thought would be good to eat. Then, making haste to get clear of the neighbourhood of the dry fish, they sought more salubrious air on the open road.

The sun was high and the road was hot, and the forests through which they passed were not umbrageous. Meagre firs, lopped of all their branches save for a tuft at the top, stood sparsely in a waste of broom and heather like pins in a pincushion. Till the village was far behind the very ground was shaven, and they met women toiling back, bent under loads of prickly scrub that they carried on their shoulders.

" Hope we'll soon come to somewhere where we can buy more food," said Jack.

" It's not nearly time for lunch," Honor reminded him. " We're not half-way to Viana."

" A cup of coffee and a few little rolls isn't much to do ten miles on," Jack remarked sadly.

" Well, Patricia put up some chocolate."

Honor produced two solid slabs, and he was quiet for another couple of miles.

It was an unpromising country that stretched before them—scrubby hills stuck over with firs as far as eye could see. They passed a few clusters of hovels, saw an occasional old woman cutting scrub with a curved knife, and here and there a child herding goats over the fenceless waste.

" If there were even a decent farmhouse," said Jack, " one might get something to eat."

He wandered off the road to look down a gully and see if it sheltered a farmhouse, sighted something, and plunged down the gully-side with a whoop. The slope was precipitous and slippery as glass with dry fir-needles, and he disappeared with unpremeditated swiftness. Honor, surefooted as a goat, followed laughing, to find him in a dishevelled condition at the bottom, wrapping his hand in a handkerchief and looking green.

"What have you done to your hand?" she demanded.

"Oh, nothing," he said, putting it behind him. "Only caught a snag coming down."

"Here, show me—idiot!"

Honor was frightened for a moment, and fright was of the things that affected her temper. He bent before it, and surrendered a hand for which, in the condition it was in, he had no personal use. She made him hold it in the stream, and when she could see the extent of the injury, decided with relief that it was not serious—an ugly, jagged tear across the palm, but not deep. She attended to it with skilful fingers and the available appliances, which consisted of stream-water, a pocket-knife and a couple of clean handkerchiefs. The boy looked up the stream and down the stream while she worked, and was acutely conscious of the comfort of her touch.

"There, that'll do till this evening," she said. "What on earth were you after, down here?"

He went a few steps round a jutting rock and pointed. The lower course of the stream was fringed with a tall growth of heath, covered with white blossom like foam.

"Some luck about this place!" he said. "It looked like a white waterfall from the top at first."

Honor, having a garden of her own, was not insensible to the thrill of strange vegetation.

"Let's stay and have lunch here," she said. "It's a jolly place."

They were in a little grassy pocket in the ravine, shaded by spreading trees for once, with the white-fringed watercourse below them. Jack took the lump of cheese out of his pocket, where it had begun to ooze through its newspaper wrapper, and considered it thoughtfully.

"Do you know," he said, "I don't feel so awfully like lunch, after all."

"On that? I didn't think you would."

Honor sat down, and from her own pockets produced

sundry parcels containing buttered rolls, slices of beef, and salt and cakes. Out of her case came a bottle of cold coffee and the silver cup of Patricia's flask. Jack was too much moved for immediate speech.

"If you thought," she observed, "you'd find your luncheon growing on the bushes in a country like this —I didn't."

"But where did you raise it?" he marvelled.

"From the hotel kitchen before you were awake this morning. I just went round and pointed at what I wanted. I'd like to see myself setting out without provisions!"

"I must say, Honor," exclaimed her fellow-wayfarer, in admiration, "you are a useful person to have knocking round!"

"It's more than you are," said Honor. "Keep that hand up or it'll bleed again, and give me the knife to cut up your food."

Jack sat meekly at her feet to be fed, with his bandaged right hand under his chin. It was very pleasant to sit there in the shade and look down, as out of a high window, on the sunny valley below. Honor, squatting on a stone on the lap of Mother Earth, in her serviceable clothes, thick shoes and plain felt hat, fitted into her surroundings as appropriately as any other natural growth. She was not a girl who showed to advantage in places where conventional standards obtain, for she despised vanity and left her appearance severely to itself. But out of doors the unspoilt beauty of her youth and strength came to its own, though she might squat with more regard to convenience than to grace, her consciousness being absorbed in bread and beef.

"But what did you want to keep all this up your sleeve for?" Jack remonstrated when his hunger was appeased. "Letting me waste our good *scudos* on the cheese and stuff."

Honor chuckled.

"If you'd known it was there you'd have wanted to eat it long ago, and then you wouldn't have it now.

Besides, it's jolly good for you to have to waste a few ha'pence sometimes. If you don't take care, you'll die a miser with your money in a hole under your bed."

Honor was gentle-born, but she had lived too near the people not to have absorbed some of their detestation of the deadly sin of parsimony, towards which Jack's frugal mind sometimes verged. She had been really relieved to see that he could be extravagant on occasion, as in the purchase of his silly cheese.

"I say, look!" he said suddenly, as she was repacking the remnants of the feast. His roving eye had discovered that a light speck in the grass by the stream was a daffodil half the size of a snowdrop. It was white, as daffodils go, and its outer petals turned back ridiculously. The two were on their knees in the grass in a minute, with their heads close together over it, and Jack pronounced it too jolly to dig up. He felt so much the better for it that he ate the cheese, which had become too messy to go back in his pocket. He had to pare away a good deal of Portuguese news which had printed off on its surface from the covering paper, and Honor said that he would die, and that she would not attend his funeral.

Meanwhile she found another daffodil with a withered blossom, and said it must be dug up for Aunt Vinie. Jack dug with his knife in his left hand till he became convinced that the root was in Australia.

"We might just as well go round outside and get it there, as make a hole through the middle of the earth. It wouldn't really take any longer."

Honor went on digging with a pointed stick till she got to a bulb the size of a pea a foot down among the pine-roots. Then she finished packing, covered all untidy traces of their camp, and said it was time to be moving if they wanted their tea in Viana.

Jack, having lunched solidly, felt beautifully independent of tea, and saw no need to go yet. The day was hot, and it was such a jolly place.

" Funny, somehow, to think we'll never see it again," he hazarded.

But Honor was not a good subject for sentiment. She said there would be other nice places further on; and, taking her luggage on two fingers, jumped the stream and left him to follow or not as he chose. She had time for just one backward glance at their green hollow before he overtook her on the top of the further bank. He brought two sprays of the white heather with him.

" Keep it for luck," he said, chucking one over with the lack of ceremony which had hitherto marked their relations. The girl caught it with the same nonchalance, and said nothing. Their behaviour to each other would not change—not, at least, while they were adrift alone together. But the time had gone by when Honor was no more to Jack than a substitute for his sister Betty, and when Honor could take him for granted.

As the blaze of full day gave way to the glamour of evening, the wayfarers reached Viana. It was a little town with spires and gum trees standing dark against the shining westward sea, and bright against sierras to the east. Viana lay low at the sea-mouth of a valley that widened behind it into a basin with flat, alluvial floor and a wall of mountains. The railway ran through the town to cross the valley southward, and the most notable feature, to the travellers, was the sight of a train getting up steam among the gum trees.

They hurried through the narrow, cobbled streets and across the open space before the station. After them hurried a retinue of beggars, lame, blind, ulcerous and misshapen, who had risen from every corner to pursue with surprising agility, since Honor had given their remnants of food to the first few.

" She's heading south all right," said Jack, with regard to the train. " She's bound to be for Oporto or somewhere in that direction. Good enough, anyway."

"There's some kind of a sentry at the door," said Honor.

"Yes. It'll be an emergency service run by the military."

A diminutive soldier in baggy light-grey uniform was guarding the station entrance with a rifle. When the strangers came up with their following, he barred the way.

"Quite right, too," said Jack, looking over his shoulder at their escort of villainous rapscallions. He swept a space clear behind them, and turned again to reason with the sentry.

"Now look here, you can't stop us, you know," he said firmly in English and the British manner. "We're not a riot or anything to do with your beastly gravy. We want to catch that train. What do you think you're running trains for, if not for people to go in them?"

Finally he put the little man aside, and they passed through. The sentry offered no resistance, being surprised.

"That's all right," said Jack. "Now for tickets."

Honor, admiring but dubious, kept silence. The ticket office was closed. Jack hammered and shouted for five minutes without evoking any sign of life. Then the train, which had been wandering on shunt-lines among the gum trees, backed up till its rear van was not far from the end of the platform. The waiting crowd swarmed over the rails and escaladed the carriages.

"Come on. We'll get in too and pay afterwards," Jack decided.

They were soon at the steps of a carriage. But an official in the door thrust them back, demanding—presumably—their tickets; another ran from the platform to interpose himself between them and the train, and was reinforced by soldiers with fixed bayonets. The train, without warning or ceremony, slid away, and Jack was left for once inarticulate with indignation.

" Come on out of this before we get into a row," said Honor. " There's a back way among those trees that isn't guarded."

But slinking through back ways and tame giving in to obstruction did not appeal to Mr. Russell at the moment.

" We'll know what's the meaning of it first," he declared. " Here's an officer."

Honor took an instant dislike to the officer—which was ungrateful, for his little eyes under fat lids dwelt on her fair, flushed skin with appreciation. He was dark, though not more so than many of his compatriots, and had singularly thick lips and frizzled hair. But he spoke French, which was enough for Jack in the temper he was in.

" What's the meaning of our not being able to take tickets when we were here a good five minutes before the train went? *Un bon cinq minutes devant que le train allait? Quoi veut dire notre non pouvoir prendre billets pour* Oporto? "

The officer understood at least one word of the inquiry.

" O Porto? *Monsieur* has, then, a permit for the Porto? " He said in somewhat better French.

" *Un quoi?* " asked Jack.

" A pass from the military authority. Without that it is not to be done for anyone to render himself to the Porto. Incapable! "

" We did not know about permits. Where does one get them? "

" So *Monsieur* has not a permit? But how, then, did *Monsieur* penetrate here? "

Jack's temper had blown over by this time, and he grinned in a confidential and disarming manner. The officer grinned back, showing splendid teeth, and shrugged his shoulders. He presumed bribery, and made a note that his sentry would be liable to get unusually drunk when next off duty. Then his glance went back to the girl, straying from her ankles to her

round neck and bright hair, but avoiding her cold-blue eyes.

"For the pass," he said amiably. "That will, no doubt, arrange itself perfectly, if I may see the papers of *Monsieur* and—*Mademoiselle?*"

"Passports?" Jack's face fell. He explained with words laboriously strung together that one of their passports had by an accident preceded them to Oporto. If a permit could not be had without the passport, they must telegraph to Oporto to their friends.

His narrative lacked lucidity, and failed to carry conviction. The officer's countenance changed, and suspicion replaced his desire to oblige. The post office, he said, was under military control, and persons without papers could not telegraph to the Porto, nor yet send letters. "*Non pas. Incapable.*"

"But why?"

"*Incapable.*"

"But if you see what we write?"

"*Incapable.*"

"Stupid brute!" said Jack aside to Honor. "Bit of a touch of the tar-brush, you know."

On the word, Honor's dislike of their interlocutor grew to fear and loathing. She perceived that there were other things in the world than she had reckoned with, and more than she would dare to face alone.

"This is how it stands," Jack told her, after further parley in obscure French. "Our friend thinks it's his duty to suspect us—don't know what of. But we don't seem to be exactly under arrest if we're ready to go quietly and stay at the Grand Hotel, where he can keep his eye on us."

"Do you really think he's black?" Honor asked in a whisper.

"Oh, Lord, no! Only slate-grey. He might be lighter if he washed. Quite a well-meaning, civil chap, you know, but stupid. Let's hope there's some senior officer knocking round who's got some sense, for if not, it looks as if we might stay here till the end of this

strike! Nothing for it now, of course, but to come along. He's going to take us to his hotel."

As they went, Jack inserted himself between Honor and their negroid companion. The rôle of protector was entirely congenial, and though he felt more doubt of the issue than he meant to show, he would have been exhilarated by the adventure had he been altogether satisfied with his own conduct of affairs.

"You were right about getting into a row," he owned to Honor, as they were shepherded into the Grand Hotel. "I'm frightfully sorry."

Honor had lost her peevishness in face of serious trouble.

"We were bound to get stuck somewhere," she said, "with me not having a passport. It might have been worse, later. This place looks fairly decent."

CHAPTER XXI

ANY PORT——

WHEN Pavington scribbled his letter to Jack, while the *Orsina* was steaming out of Vigo Bay, he had not time to mention such details as that his party also had missed the tender, and only reached the ship at the last minute in a row-boat and a considerable fuss.

It did not occur at once to any of them that the children —as Miss Pringle called them—were not already safe on board. Even when Patricia grew uneasy and instituted a search, the ship had to be ransacked from stem to stern before Miss Pringle would believe that they were missing, such was her faith in Jack. Pavington, meanwhile, in the slow and thorough manner that was his, had been working out probabilities. He reached the conclusion that the lost pair were bound sooner or later to have recourse to the shipping agent, and that funds and instructions might safely be sent for them there by means of the pilot. This arranged, he and Patricia thought all well and rather amusing.

But Miss Pringle's feelings were different. It was natural, she considered, for Patricia and Bernard to take things too lightly. They also were of an irresponsible generation, and they were in love with each other, and too much must not be expected of them. But she was accountable for the boy and girl whom she had brought out on this perilous expedition, and till she recovered them safely at Oporto she would not know a moment's ease of mind.

"I am too vexed with myself. I should never have let them out of my sight," she lamented, down in the

cabin that the girls had shared, where Patricia was putting up Honor's stray possessions.

It was fortunate that Honor was a tidy soul and had left little out, as all that there was had to be fitted into Patricia's luggage, which was compact already. Honor kept her cases locked and the key in her pocket.

"I call it most annoying of Honor," said her godmother. "I am sure it is all her fault that they were late. She really is too tiresome. So pigheaded and impossible to move. I will never take her abroad again. My goodness! Here is her hairbrush. I knew you could not possibly have sent her all she wanted for the night in that tiny case. Now, have you any room to pack it?"

"Would it possibly go into your bonnet-box?"

"I am sure it will not. But I suppose I must see. If you give it to me, and whatever else you aren't able to cope with."

Patricia handed over the brush and some handkerchiefs and a little writing-case. She judged by her friend's exacerbated tone that she was badly worried, and thought it would be a comfort to her to have something to do.

Now Lavinia Pringle had never in her life before had to pack anything. Lanktree had done for her on the rare occasions when she left her home, and Patricia had taken Lanktree's place for the trip. To add Honor's items into a moderately full box was therefore a more serious undertaking than Patricia could have imagined. In an hour's time it was not accomplished, but most of her own things had come out and become unfolded. To complicate the situation further, the ship began to roll, and the heavy box travelled with increasing momentum from one side of the cabin floor to the other. A lurid sunset light struck in at the port-hole, and Lavinia said to herself that there was going to be a bad storm, and Mary Agnes would certainly be dreadfully ill, and Patricia would not be

able to leave her to go on alone, and if the children had not turned up at the Oporto hotel, what was to happen?

Her thoughts went to her drawing-room at home, with its restful colouring and comfortable chairs. At this hour the curtains would be drawn and there would be a blazing fire. How pleasant to be there, with her knitting and a book of travels, the cat on her knee, and no young people on her conscience! She inclined more and more, as the sea grew rougher, to be sure that she had been right in thinking that, at her time of life, it was better to read about foreign places than to go and see them.

Patricia, finding her in this mood, was herself assailed by doubts. Was it really too late for Miss Pringle to change her ways? Was she perhaps not fitted by nature for the ups and downs of life outside her sheltered backwater, and had it been a mistake to encourage her to venture forth? What would happen if anything went seriously wrong, when she was so desperately upset over the first little incident? So Patricia wondered. But, then, Patricia herself was accustomed to ups and downs of all kinds, and did not know what it was not to like the motion of the sea. It was only an amusement for her to tidy a whirling cabin and deal with the itinerant bonnet-box. She cleared the berth for Miss Pringle to lie down on, and procured her a hot-bottle; and these creature comforts made a difference in the elder lady's outlook, and enabled her to believe Patricia's report that the Farrellys were getting on quite well.

The swell went down in the night, and her life's habit stood to Lavinia, and she slept soundly, though she had not expected to be able to close an eye. The morning was calm and fair, and Patricia was early on deck, scanning the rocky coast of Portugal for signs of the harbour of Leixoes, where they were to land for Oporto. She was impatient for an end to Miss Pringle's anxieties, if not herself much disturbed about

the wanderers, and even a little inclined to envy them the adventure.

But ten minutes later, when Pavington found her out, the first glimpse of her face told him that something had happened. She was standing by the rail, frowning at the dark line of coast, and at the sound of his step she turned quickly. Even while he asked what was wrong, he marvelled at the depravity of man that could make him bless whatever evil it was that made her so pleased to see him.

"Haven't you heard?" she said. "It's Portugal. They're just starting a revolution or something! 'Acute political trouble'"—she quoted the wireless news of which an operator had just given her an early version—"'Social unrest. Martial law declared in northern area.' What about Jack and Honor now? Miss Pringle's distracted enough as it is, and this really is anxious."

Pavington was not disposed to take the news overseriously. He said that Portuguese revolutions were proverbial, and that he should not wonder if the two were in Oporto and didn't know that anything was happening. Patricia thought, what a comfortable, calm person he was to have at hand in an emergency.

"But if they are not there," she said. "What are we to do? We must have a plan of campaign, and spare Miss Pringle all the worry we can. She isn't accustomed to alarms and excursions. I blame myself for inciting her to come abroad."

Mr. West was silent. She supposed him to be laying out a scheme of action, but when he spoke again it was to ask: "Why should you blame yourself about Miss Pringle?"

"Because of all this bother. Because she wouldn't be here if we all hadn't stirred her up."

"She wouldn't have come," said Pavington, "for any stirring, if she hadn't had—whatever made her do it—bottled up inside her. I'm sure you needn't feel guilty."

How like him, thought Patricia, to pursue these abstract meditations in the middle of a crisis! But it was not his usual way to be sure of anything with such promptitude. She had long since discovered that he had none of the ready-made opinions convenient for ordinary converse. His manner was to work out an independent judgment on any point that arose, and have it ready some time after everyone else had forgotten the subject.

However, no one could be more practical than Pavington when he chose, and he soon convinced Patricia of what she had already feared—that there could be no question now of their pleasant scheme of all going into Oporto together to collect the young people. In the circumstances, he must go in alone, and if they were not at the Paris, stay and look for them, and hope to rejoin her and Miss Pringle on the *Orsina* at Lisbon. He did not think, by all accounts, that the revolution was likely to be dangerous. But it must cause minor difficulties and annoyances to which Miss Pringle could not be exposed. Patricia had to agree; and she accepted her own passive part without complaint. She hated to be out of things, and still more she hated not to know what was happening to other people.

"When shall we all meet again?" she wondered.

Soon, he hoped with sincerity. He had the impulse to say more—a great deal more. But the words did not come so readily, and he remembered that she did not know who he was. The time had not come to speak, and he did not speak, and the silence was growing tense when Miss Pringle appeared, to their relief.

The disagreeable news had to be broken to her, and the plan of campaign set forth. They had arranged in detail how to meet all contingencies that they could foresee, and she heard them to the end. Then she said:

"It will certainly be best for Patricia to stay on the ship. But I think you are forgetting that it is I who

am responsible for those children, and not either of you. I shall be most grateful for your help, Bernard, of course. But I am going with you."

A couple of hours later they were emerging—all three—from the Leixoes custom-house. The intervening time had been filled with a battle royal of wills, in which Miss Pringle had not completely triumphed, since she could not constrain Patricia to stay behind. But she had quelled Bernard. She wore a mildly victorious air as she emerged, and looked more than usual, to her harassed cousin, like a picture-lady suited to a mellow-gold frame in a quiet room. In the glare of the dusty open space before the custom-house stood a picket of soldiers, ostentatiously armed; and, further on, a little gathering of ordinary citizens herded together near the tram-lines, and whispered as people do under pressure of public emergency. Beyond them the main road to the capital of the north lay deserted.

"You can see for yourself—" said Pavington.

"I can!" said Miss Pringle, with a brevity that made Patricia laugh.

Pavington had, several times during the last few hours, wished that he could quote the words his cousin had once written to him about her reliance on the judgment of the head of her family. Patricia felt a little tempted to remind Miss Pringle of her condemnation of pigheadedness in Honor. And Miss Pringle refrained, out of politeness, from telling them both in so many words that the more serious they made the situation seem, the clearer it was to her that she must be there to supervise it in person.

All the luggage had to be left at Leixoes. They had already learnt that the local trains were stopped, and that no car or carriage could be hired. The trams were still running, and were the only possible means of getting to the ten-mile-distant city on their adventurous quest.

"A tram," Miss Pringle considered, "is an unromantic vehicle. But it cannot be helped."

They joined the group of little people waiting at the terminus. Patricia could look down on most of their hat-brims, and she was not above medium height in her own country. The other two would have been stared at for giants in normal times, for the Pringles ran to stature, and Pavington took after his mother. But the crowd had other things to think of, and there was ample time for excitement and rumours to brew before any tram came.

Patricia got into conversation with an old gentleman who spoke English. He said that not many cars were on the line. Some had been wrecked in the riots yesterday, and not all the employees would face the streets. Besides, the mob had attacked the company's power-station, and the current since then was erratic. He did not himself intend to embark on any car. No, certainly. He was only here to hear the latest news from the city, and to see how long the line would be able to function at all.

Pavington had relapsed into his old seriousness. He might make light of Portuguese disorders while he thought he was going into the country alone. But, encumbered as he was, it was different. He did not like the feeling in the air, and his conscience impelled him to a last attempt to persuade Lavinia even now to go back to the ship and take Miss Fitzgerald with her.

"My dear Bernard," said Miss Pringle, "if you and Patricia were to go back to the ship there would be some point in it, seeing that this is my business and responsibility."

"And so much for you, 'my dear Bernard'!" thought Patricia. She knew that when once Miss Pringle had made up her mind where her duty lay, remonstrance was vain.

At last a tram loomed on the far perspective of the line. It approached. By that time the waiting group

had become a crowd of alarming size. It was obvious that no one car would contain the half of it. But in the event this one tram started back, crawling, for Oporto under the weight of the entire assemblage. Driver and conductor were not a force strong enough to repel, or even control, the rush and assault. Naturally the people were not all carried inside, since the greater will not go into the less. When the platform and steps were crammed solid, the overflow adhered to external projections in clusters like swarming bees.

Pavington had got Miss Pringle a seat inside—no mean achievement. Patricia stood near her. He himself took station just outside on the front platform, where four or five persons might ordinarily have stood without incommoding the driver, and where there were now nineteen. Inside, little city clerks and strapping fisherwomen with their bags and baskets were compacted together in a solid mass that could hardly breathe. Miss Pringle and Patricia were in a favoured position near the door, and Patricia could communicate with Mr. West over the heads of the intervening natives.

Pavington kept his position outside, not so much to see the scenery, which consisted of the city's garbage-heaps edging a turbid sea, as to watch the road, whose aspect he liked less and less. There was complete suspension of the normal activities of life. All that they passed in the way of traffic was a string of ox-wagons loaded with farm produce. These were escorted by soldiers, who held in the big mules they rode to their slowest walk, and yet kept outpacing the convoy and having to stop and wait till the great biscuit-coloured oxen plodded level. For the rest, there was no stir of life. Only men standing idle at the corners, who greeted the moving tram with dark looks. At a point where the houses thickened to a street, he reached in across heads and shoulders and put down the window behind Miss Pringle.

"There may be stones flying any minute," he said to

Patricia. "The less glass there is about, the better. Can you get the next one down?"

"Yes," she said. But she waited to initiate a general rattling down of jammed windows till the tram was going well, and the communal nerve inside the car relaxed. The mass of humanity behind her was good-humoured and lethargic, but uneasy, especially when the pace flagged. She could feel that a little thing might start a stampede that would be worse than many showers of broken glass.

When it came, the first flight of missiles went wide. The driver took phlegmatical note of the throwers, a bunch of idlers at an alley-corner, who were groping for more stones. He leant back with all his weight against the press on the platform, to clear a little room for his elbows, and let out the tram to her utmost. In a momentary spurt, she left the pursuing enemy behind. But there was a thicker gathering ahead where the road mounted a rise.

"Can you slip out, and get Miss Pringle to come—quickly?" Pavington asked.

"No," said Patricia. "Not without starting a panic." She and Miss Pringle whispered together, and they kept their places.

The steps were clearing, the platform was thinning, and escape from the car momently becoming easier. But at the same time pursuit gained as the pace slackened. Pavington could hear yells and the clattering of wooden shoes behind. Then he saw a stir in the crowd ahead, and outlying groups began to run to meet them.

"You MUST come now," he said, clearing the doorway for Patricia. She helped Miss Pringle to her feet, and they came out—followed by a surge of frightened passengers which would have gone headlong over the edge of the still-moving platform had not Pavington's arm been strong enough for a barrier. Then the report of a shot rang over the crest of the hill in front. The forward rush checked an instant, and in the instant Pavington was on the ground, helping Miss Pringle to

jump. She jumped, and lost her balance. A big fish-wife who landed at her side put out a hand to steady her, then picked up a clod and ran off gleefully to join the riot.

The whole quarter was alive with running, shouting hooligans. The tram stopped, and the people poured out pell-mell, and Pavington had lost Patricia and was in an agony. But she shook herself out of the stream and rejoined them, only a little dishevelled. Up and over the hill came a scurry of hoofs and dust, and half a dozen galloping cavalrymen. They drove through the scatter of mob, and pulled in blowing horses to the inland side of the tram, which stood on the seaward edge of the wide road. Conductor and driver and the mass of passengers vanished with surprising celerity. Pavington, reconnoitring, concluded that it was all very well for them. They were on their own ground and knew which way to run. But he did not dare to lead a *bourgeois* party aimlessly into the open. Luck had helped them so far, and luck must be trusted to show them something better to do than to crouch in the shelter of the tram while brickbats flew over their heads.

Another handful of soldiers was trying to clear the street from the top of the hill to where their comrades guarded the tram. There was mighty whirling of sabres and demonstration and dust. Patricia thought of a sheepdog gathering a refractory flock, with snaps and butts on one side and the other.

"It's the flat of their sabres and shots in the air and who can bluff best," she said, reassured. She knew something of civil strife, and had seen a battle at home where contending armies on opposite sides of one street had fired in the air for the length of a summer afternoon, and concluded the engagement without casualties.

But that was not in a Latin country. The long-sighted Pavington could count more revolvers among the insurgents than he liked; and in particular he was worried by the movements of certain men who went from group to group, and whose passage was marked by the solidifying of a hitherto incoherent rabble. He

scouted further, examining the position on all sides. Behind them was the inauspicious bit of street where the trouble had begun. To the west was the sea. But a short way in front, where the hill rose, the tram-line left the road and followed a levelled cutting of its own between the road and the walls of an old fort with a little red dome like a beehive. If they could get to the cutting, it should give safe passage to a point probably well behind the fluctuating line of scrimmage. At the worst, it would seem a sounder place to take cover in than behind the main object of attack.

As he calculated the distance, a cavalry horse was struck by a well-aimed bottle. Rearing and plunging, he unseated his rider. The mob howled in triumph. Pavington did not wait to see whether the incident meant laughter or bloodshed. The others were ready at his signal, and there was time while the diversion lasted to run across the open and gain the cutting unnoticed.

They came out on the road again at the base of the other side of the hill. They were well beyond the riot. But from round the bend of the road came sounds of another conflict, and fugitives running. Pavington, looking right and left for a way out of the trap, descried the opening of a side-street at the right near the top of the rise. So they turned back in that direction, and made up the hill. Miss Pringle panted a little, and he ran on to reconnoitre their way, leaving her to follow more slowly with Patricia.

On the corner stood a low, white house that made three sides of a square about a tiny *patio*. Even in the agitation of flight, its type caught Pavington's notice, and he saw as he came nearer that the grille in the *patio's* vine-covered railings had opened by a crack. A human eye looked out and was observing their progress. As he turned back, discouraged, from his scouting in the side-street, a hand came out of the crack and beckoned. Another minute, and the iron door had opened to admit them all to the green and quiet shade of the courtyard of the Hotel da Foz.

CHAPTER XXII

"MORE FLIES ARE CAUGHT WITH A DROP OF HONEY——"

"BUT yes," said the man who had opened to them. "It will be more sage to wait in here a little, till it is quieter outside. Yes, I saw *Mesdames* from the window, and *Monsieur* where he directed himself, and I think the back streets to-day are not for *les gens comme il faut*."

He spoke French, and Miss Pringle thanked him in old-fashioned, formal phrases of the same language.

"*Monsieur's* kindness is the more appreciated," she concluded, "that so far his country has not given us a very amiable reception!"

"But I," he protested, "I am not of this country. I am of Spain, *Dieu merci*."

"I am glad to hear it," said Miss Pringle. "For Portugal appears to me an excessively ill-regulated country."

The Spaniard expressed, by gesture if not in idiom, that it was all that.

"*Madame* has great courage," he declared, bowing.

Miss Pringle rather thought so too. She remained calm and mistress of herself, as she had been throughout. But she was physically exhausted, and Patricia thought it well that they could order luncheon here and rest before further adventure. While they waited, the Spanish *patron* answered their questions as to where they were and what was happening.

They were in the suburb of the Foz do Douro, he said, which was to say at the mouth of the River Douro,

half-way between Leixoes and the city. As to what was going on, they learnt with surprise that the trouble had begun with the ox-cart drivers, who had associated themselves in a strike of automobilists against a speed-limit imposed by the municipality. This action of the carters had grave consequences, for their pickets stopped the peasant-wagons bringing in produce from the country. So the markets were without supplies, and the townsfolk became enraged. There was much excitement, and the Government was blamed, of course, for everything. The opponents of the present Government saw their opportunity. The Communists were roused in the Old Town, and the Monarchist party was no less active. Thus the trouble was become serious. Martial law was declared and the General Diaz Galdos sent from Lisbon to restore order in the north. Now Diaz Galdos was a monster of brutality and ruthlessness, and as a protest against him the Post Office had declared a strike, and since this morning the railways.

" Ah ! " said Miss Pringle.

" It is, in fact, a strike of all transport, and only the tramway, which is an English company, has not joined. This is the explanation of the attack on the tram which *Madame* was so unfortunate as to experience."

" Then the trains were running as usual last night? " asked Patricia.

" And the town—the Paris Hotel, is it safe there? " Miss Pringle wanted to know.

The *patron* thought the town had been somewhat pacificated by the military.

Pavington inquired how long it was usual for these upheavals to last.

The *patron* said it depended. But in this instance it would either be short or worse than usual, since Diaz Galdos commanded. The General was a brute, but a brute who knew his business, and there would be no half-measures. Already he held strongly all important points, among others the old *castelo* over the way.

Pavington was calculating that they could not hope to find a better base of operations than the Hotel da Foz. The Spanish proprietor impressed him as a man to be trusted. The fort almost opposite was a protection. Lavinia and Miss Fitzgerald could be left here in safety while he went into the town, to the Paris, in search of Honor and Jack.

Midday *almoço* that day, for the few who partook of it, was served to an accompaniment of distant shots and clamour. It was an intermittent meal, the waiter bringing in a course whenever the *patron* saw and pursued him, and not otherwise. In the intervals the children belonging to a native family ran about, unchecked by their parents, and made salt-pies with their fingers in the cellars on the many unoccupied tables. Miss Pringle looked with unwarranted suspicion on the food when it appeared, and with still more unwarrantable toleration on the children. She said that she had not had so many meals in her life out of her own dining-room, and this was a variety. Certainly, if Hayden had dropped a fork when his hands were full of plates, he would not have shuffled it along the floor with his foot to the service-table.

Afterwards came a weary spell of waiting with nothing to do but to wonder what was happening in the town. At last, when all was quiet outside, and after consultation with the *patron*, Pavington set out to make his way to the Paris and fetch the two young people if they were there. The Spaniard considered it the good moment, while tranquillity lasted. He himself was going out in the opposite direction, on business connected with the victualling of his house, and he offered to bring back the smaller items of the guests' luggage from Leixoes.

Miss Pringle and Patricia, left to themselves, sat through the long evening at an upper window looking out and wondering at the unnatural stillness that held the suburb. Their window commanded the old fort, with the flag of the present republic flying over its

Moorish dome; a little public garden with trampled cineraria-beds; the river-mouth, and nearer, the hilly bit of street that had been so steep to climb in their flight that morning.

" I hope to goodness Bernard is being sensible, and not doing anything rash," said Miss Pringle. " Certainly he managed very well this morning. Really surprisingly well, for it is people who are not too intellectual—like Jack—that one expects to be capable in an emergency."

Patricia smiled to herself, but she only said:

" Jack is an exceptionally capable person. How clever it was of your cousin, Lord Pavington, to have found him for Ardreenan! "

Miss Pringle looked away out of the window with the clear, far-sighted eyes that had an odd resemblance to Mr. West's.

" Patricia," she demanded with some sternness, " did I ever tell you that my cousin Pavington sent Jack to Ardreenan? "

" I don't know that you did. I don't really remember."

" Or did Jack? "

" Oh, never! " Patricia grew embarrassed, for the remarkable mystery in which Mr. Russell shrouded his connection with Lord Pavington was such as to suggest something shady about that peer.

" Then why do you assume that my cousin did send him? "

" It was what everybody said. It didn't occur to me to think anything else."

Patricia's alert eyes were full of benevolent curiosity, and Miss Pringle's sternness melted.

" I cannot see what business it is of ' everybody's ' where my agent comes from. But you and your mother are different, my dear, and I do not mind telling you what I have already told Bernard."

In lowered tones she described the manner of Jack's coming to Ardreenan.

" I know you will understand," she concluded. " I did not wish the story generally known, because some people might be a little shocked with Jack, and they would certainly think me foolish. But I am coming to see that I have put the boy in a false position, and also been unfair to my cousin. Pavington has Irish connections, and I am afraid he will be very vexed when it comes round to him that he is supposed to have done such a very odd thing as sending Jack."

" If it were me, I'd be flattered," said Patricia.

" I quite believe you would, my dear! " Miss Pringle inwardly wondered whether any unconventionality would be too great for the Geraldstown family. " But, you see, my cousin is different. I have never seen him, but by all accounts he is like his dear father, who would not at all have liked to be held responsible for anything wild. Jack was a wild experiment of mine, and I really dread what Pavington will think of me when I write to him again."

" Again? "

" Of course. As soon as he is back in England I must ask him to find permanent work for Jack and a proper agent for Ardreenan."

Miss Pringle sighed. Her first duty was to Ardreenan and Mr. Russell's indiscretion in losing himself in Vigo reminded her forcibly of his irresponsible youth.

" Lord Pavington's to be away a good long time, isn't he? " said Patricia hopefully.

" I do not know. I am afraid he may soon get tired of travelling. I cannot imagine his father enjoying, for instance, this country——"

" Here he is! " suddenly exclaimed Patricia, whose thoughts had flown out of the window at sight of a figure rounding the bend of the road.

" What! Oh, yes indeed, it is Mr. West, safely back, thank goodness. But—alone."

" He may have news, though."

" Do you know, my dear," Miss Pringle owned, " you

quite made me jump when you said: ' Here he is.' We had been talking of poor Pavington!"

They hurried down to meet Mr. West in the vine-roofed *patio*.

He brought a reassuring report. Nothing had been heard of the wanderers at the Paris. But he had ascertained that the night train from Vigo which should have brought them had arrived without delay or hindrance, and that since then no train had crossed the border. It was safe to conclude that they had missed the train in the evening, and were held up in Vigo, out of all harm's way.

" To think," said Miss Pringle, " how dreadful it seemed yesterday that they should be stranded there, and now—what a blessing!"

Next morning Pavington set out again for the town. A wire might get through to the Paris from Vigo. Or he might telegraph for news to the Spanish agent, if he succeeded in finding out when the certain hours occurred at which the Central Telegraph Office was said to be open for private business.

The neighbourhood of the Foz was perfectly quiet. The day wore on, and Mr. West did not return. When it came to the afternoon, Patricia could no longer resist going out to see what the streets were like. Miss Pringle, who was still fatigued after her exertions of the previous day, lay down upstairs and presently fell asleep.

She was rudely wakened by a housemaid bursting into the room, full of alarm and unable to explain herself. She could only make it clear that the Senhora must come downstairs at once. Miss Pringle rose in haste and followed her—terrified, and wondering whether it was Patricia or Bernard or both who had got shot in the streets.

In the *patio* she found awaiting her a military personage in impressive uniform and accoutrements.

" What has happened?" she asked breathlessly in her unpractised French, hardly pausing to acknowledge an elaborate salute.

The officer produced a document, which, being in Portuguese, conveyed naught to her.

"I have to interrogate *Madame* on this affair——"

"But what is it?" she interrupted.

"It is, that I must ask certain questions——"

"But can you not tell me what is wrong?"

"I think that is for *Madame* to explain," said the young man sternly, and referred to his document. "Yesterday, at Viana do Castelo in the Minho——"

"Oh!" exclaimed Miss Pringle, vastly relieved. "Then nothing has happened here to-day."

"What is this about to-day?" He looked at her sharply. "It is yesterday that certain persons of suspicious character have been arrested in Viana and detained pending inquiry."

Miss Pringle was much outraged.

"I regret," she said, "that I can give you no information whatever about suspicious persons in Viana do Castelo. I have never heard the name of the place before, and there are no such persons among my acquaintance. Good evening."

She bowed stiffly and turned to withdraw.

"Wait, *Madame*," the officer cried out peremptorily. "Do you then deny all knowledge of the persons in question?"

"Absolutely. I do not know anyone at all in this country—and do not wish to," she finished the sentence to herself. She had taken a strong prejudice against Portugal, and she resented this consequential young man with his sabre and his waxed moustache, who had come and frightened her out of her wits for nothing, by some idiotic mistake.

"No one at all?" he repeated. "Who was it, then, might I ask, who gave *Madame's* name and address this morning at a certain hotel in the town?"

"My address? Who indeed!" exclaimed Miss Pringle. "Cannot you understand that you are making a mistake? I am not the person you are seeking."

" Pardon, but I think it is *Madame* who makes the mistake in seeking to withhold information. This may be a disagreeable affair—a very disagreeable affair. It is not the moment for the Republic to allow Royalist agents from England to slip across our frontiers and insinuate themselves into Oporto, the centre of unrest. As I was about to say, it is known that this morning a foreigner made certain inquiries at the Paris Hotel, and left *Madame's* name and address in case any message should come. Ah, I see that *Madame* is not quite ignorant of the affair after all! "

Miss Pringle had reached a point of anger and bewilderment at which her French forsook her. She could find no words to say that her friend who had called at the Paris Hotel was inquiring for other friends who were in Vigo, and had no connection with Monarchist agents in Viana do Castelo. She stood, speechless and crimson, while the officer's suspicions grew.

Neither noticed Patricia, who had come in from the street, till she was at Miss Pringle's elbow. She was glowing like a rose after her walk, and her eyes danced under their dark lashes as she looked from her ruffled friend to the resplendent foreigner.

" Is it possible," she said, having overheard the last speech, " that *Monsieur le Colonel* has come to give us news of our lost ones? "

" Indeed he has not! " said Miss Pringle wrathfully in English. " He is an insolent young man who has made a stupid mistake, and I am sure that he is not a Colonel."

So was Patricia. But she smiled on him all the same, and his suspicions waned. She was more conversant with bad French than was the elder lady, and soon elicited the main facts of the case, and—interpreting to Miss Pringle—succeeded in making her believe that it was indeed Honor and Jack who had got themselves detained as Royalist spies half-way between Vigo and Oporto.

" A most natural thing to happen," she said, hasten-

ing to forestall Miss Pringle's comment. "These disturbed times, one quite understands that anyone without proper papers must be inquired into. But if we can produce Miss Percival's passport, will not all be well?"

Miss Pringle did not see things as Patricia did.

"If *Monsieur* had explained to begin with," she said, "that he only wanted to see a passport, it would have saved all this trouble. But why, when it was known perfectly well that the passport was here, my niece should not have been let come here and get it, instead of being kept in that place, I cannot see!"

She refrained with difficulty from saying things more forcible. It was her instinct to hold the young man before her responsible for the whole imbroglio, which she considered outrageous.

"In our country," she said in English to Patricia, "the smallest village shop knows who to trust and who not to. These people must be perfect idiots."

"Yes, poor things," agreed Patricia, while she hunted in her mind for the way out of an entanglement in which she saw unpleasant possibilities.

"Now, at least," Miss Pringle continued in French, "I hope there need be no more delay. These two young people are in my charge, and I must have them both here to-night *at latest*."

The Southerner raised eyes to heaven. He said that there were formalities. He, personally, would do his utmost, and if Miss Percival's passport could be found, it was not impossible that the affair might be arranged within ten days.

"Ten days!" cried out Miss Pringle. "You imagine that my niece can stop in that place *ten days?* And when it is all a ridiculous mistake of your authorities!"

Patricia here suggested that the first thing was to find the passport, and that it was likely to be among Honor's things in the bonnet-box. When Miss Pringle

had been induced to go upstairs and look for it, considerable tension was relaxed.

Mademoiselle would understand that this was a time of national crisis, when individual cases could not receive the instant attention that *Madame* expected.

Mademoiselle understood perfectly, and was sure that *Monsieur le Capitaine*—he had confessed that he was only Captain—was very kind and helpful. She was so sure of it that he became convinced of the fact himself, and remembered a cousin in a high position on General Diaz Galdos' staff. With a little influence, he thought, the prisoners might be released from Viana by the end of the week.

"Meanwhile," said Patricia, "we can go to Viana to be near them?"

The Captain was desolated, but that would not be possible. Here again there were formalities. Since yesterday the circulation of private persons was restricted. Undoubtedly, with the help of his cousin on the staff, much might be done—in time.

Patricia divined that what was locally called time she would call eternity.

" It is the General Diaz Galdos who makes all these restrictions," she murmured thoughtfully. " So he could make exceptions in an exceptional case, if it were brought to his personal notice."

General Diaz Galdos' subordinate appeared doubtful how far the great man's personal notice was a thing to be desired.

" Of course it would be best "—Patricia pursued her meditations aloud—" if I could see the General myself, and explain."

Miss Pringle had gone upstairs expecting to find what she wanted in two minutes, and return. But—not liking to leave Patricia alone with the bold foreigner—she searched in such frantic haste that she could find nothing. It was some considerable time before she recognised the passport in an envelope in Honor's writing-case. When at last she came hurrying down,

she found Patricia and the foreigner drinking green tea together, at the little table in the corner of the *patio*, very confidentially and cheerfully.

At her appearance the young man rose, and said that duty forbade his staying longer. Patricia also stood up.

"Captain Oliveira is so very kind," she declared with enthusiasm. "He is going to try and get me an interview—he is almost sure it can be arranged for us to join the others at Viana, as they can't be got here. But I must go now at once with him in the car."

"My goodness gracious me, child! You don't think I am going to let you go off in this mad country, who knows where, with a Portuguese young man!"

"But this is such a chance," Patricia insisted urgently, —"really the only chance. We'll be here for weeks if we sit and wait for things to take their course."

"Who is it you want to interview?" Miss Pringle was too much fussed to wait for the answer which Patricia hesitated to give, remembering the terrible accounts they had heard of Diaz Galdos' ferocity. "If it is so important, I will go with you."

In an ordinary way Patricia would have liked nothing better. But she knew that the mistress of Ardreenan, in her present mood, would ensure failure to a diplomatc mission.

"We can't both go," she said promptly. "One of us must stay here and arrange about getting the rest of our luggage from Leixoes. I could stay, if you would go with Captain Oliveira?"

The appeal to Miss Pringle's essential shrewdness did not fail.

"My dear," she said, "I do not think Captain Oliveira would see that!"

Captain Oliveira was indeed feeling the call of duty strongly, and fidgetting to be gone. The military car stood before the door with its engine running. With a last, reassuring word, Patricia was into the car and away before Miss Pringle quite realised what was happening.

Patricia realised to the full that she was treating her friend cavalierly. But Mr. West would be in at any moment now to console her, and the need for action was urgent. The officer had warned her that unpleasant developments were possible before the disorders were quelled. His driver drove at racing speed, and once a shot was fired from a by-street, and the bullet chipped a wall on their other side. They had taken the Leixoes road at first, then turned at right angles, and followed a wide boulevard under a haze of budding poplar boughs, between big houses and gardens full of flowers. There were blue clumps of cinerarias and camelias and roses overflowing the walls, but all blurred to Patricia's eyes by the car's speed.

They had to go slower when they reached Oporto, and she could see more, and felt the oppression of a city whose normal life had stopped. Everywhere people were standing about, watching for something to happen. The shop-people stood at their doors, and no one went out or in. Street after street was quiet and full of a sullen anxiety. A sentry with fixed bayonet stood on every corner. In the Liberdades square, in the heart of the town, the stillness was broken by an insolent clatter and the idling groups scattered before a cavalry patrol, coming at full swing with flashing, bare blades and gay trappings out of the famous Rua Flores, where the jewellers were putting up their shutters.

" Our General will show the people who is master here," said Oliveira, grinning at the demonstration. " They are always discontented here in the North. But yes, they may be still less satisfied when we have done with them, but they will be more quiet! "

Patricia's sympathies went out to the rebellious town, and she wished she were done with Diaz Galdos and all his forces. But it was her fate always to find it difficult to maintain her just disapproval of people with whom she came in personal contact. Whatever the martial régime might be, its individual representatives

were everything that was charming. At headquarters Oliveira found access to his distinguished cousin with not more than reasonable delay. Thereafter Miss Fitzgerald was made acquainted with the heads of various departments, each of whom was said to be the man to arrange the affair for her without further trouble. All she found equally sympathetic, and all made promises, and all she perceived to be perfectly ineffectual. She, on her side, was most grateful for their kind intentions. But it remained impossible for her to go back to Miss Pringle without a written permission to travel to Viana to-morrow. In time she had involved the chief part of General Diaz Galdos' staff in consultation over her requirements, while Captain Oliveira waited her convenience in the street. The General, they maintained, was quite inaccessible. All that their united wisdom could devise was to recommend her to a last, unlikely department which had not been thought of before.

It did not surprise Patricia that, as she was being personally conducted thither by the Captain's cousin, they should meet General Diaz Galdos in a corridor. Luck usually helped at a pinch. The General frowned questioningly at her irregular presence, and the cousin could not do otherwise than present her.

The great man was neither imposing nor prepossessing of appearance, being short and shapeless, with a round face of the bluish pastiness of complexion common in his race. One look, however, was enough to inform Patricia that here was no scope for blarney. She stated her case in the fewest words, and said what she wanted.

The General said that she wanted a great deal. He spoke English, which gave privacy to their interview. She said that she would not have troubled him if it had been possible to get anything done by anybody else. She bore his scowl with cheerful composure, being, like himself, a person not easily frightened, and waited for a favourable response. Perhaps the great and ruthless commander recognised a kindred soul, for he also liked

getting things done. Possibly he considered her effect on the already inadequate wits of his staff, and thought it well to despatch the matter quickly. On whatever motive, he beckoned her into his room, wrote a sentence on a dirty bit of paper and signed it with a flourish.

" There," he said, " is the permit you desire. There will be no trains to-morrow, and all road transport is on strike. You are perhaps satisfied? "

Patricia expressed herself as perfectly satisfied, and put up the paper with great care. She had not spent the afternoon going from one office to another without forming a business-like estimate of the minor facilities which she might expect to beguile out of various potentates with whom she had established friendly relations. A smuggled trip to Viana in some military conveyance was, after all, but a small matter. Diaz Galdos' scowl intensified itself as he noted her radiant gratitude. A man of bold strategy and master of disconcerting surprises, he judged his visitor by himself.

" What is it you have in your mind? " He shot the question at her with a fierce abruptness, hoping to startle out a confession. But she turned back from the door with a face of brazen innocence.

" I was thinking," she said, " that if I had not come to you, it would have taken a fortnight to get this permission."

" A fortnight! " The General almost smiled at this simplicity. " In a fortnight, in my country, you would not have discovered how to make the first application for permission. But now, if you arrive at Viana, I prefer to know how you do it. I send a car there to-morrow morning. If you and your party can be here by ten o'clock with very little luggage, you can go."

Patricia's eloquent eyes assured him that she had always known he was better than his manners.

" How VERY good of you, General," she said. " Especially when the detaining of those silly young idiots is giving you so much more trouble than they are worth! "

There was the distinct dawn of a smile in the General's shrewd little eyes.

"So you think I will also give you an order for their release?"

"I think it would be very nice if you did."

She had already referred him to the more distinguished of her family connections in the diplomatic service for a warrant of respectability. Diaz Galdos grunted, and took up a pen.

But before he could write there was an interruption. An agitated subordinate claimed his attention for some news, evidently of an unexpected and distracting nature. Some sudden bad turn in public events, Patricia concluded, which would overwhelm their small concerns with larger ones in disaster. The subordinate illustrated his report with despairing gestures. As she watched with sinking heart, a clock outside struck the hour. Seven! She counted the strokes with horrified surprise. She had not been noticing the flight of time. Seven, and it was not three when she left the Foz! What would poor Miss Pringle be thinking?

CHAPTER XXIII

PILLAR TO POST

MISS PRINGLE had begun thinking, an hour after Patricia's disappearance, of the foolish woman in Grimm's Tales who rolled all her cheeses down the hill to fetch each other back. First Bernard, now Patricia, she had let them go off to look for Honor and Jack—and now they were all lost. Bernard had said he would certainly be in by lunch-time, and now it was afternoon. Patricia, being a Fitzgerald and wild, had whirled off without a word about where she was going, but saying that Captain Oliveira had promised to drive her back again, so it should not take long. Already it seemed to Miss Pringle to have taken a century.

She had no difficulty about the luggage from Leixoes. The *patron*, her very good friend, undertook to send for it. That arranged, she had nothing to do but to repent at leisure her weakness in letting Patricia out of her sight. As time passed, and still there was no sign of anyone, she grew frantic. Something must be done. Having no one else to turn to, she sent again for the *patron*.

"They must be searched for," she said. "I must go to the police. If it is convenient to you to come with me now, we will go at once."

The *patron* thought it would be better to wait for Mr. West. But Miss Pringle did not see the use of waiting for a person to look for himself when he was lost. Señor Garcia therefore made it convenient to accompany her to the local police station then and

there. He was one of the helpful ones of the earth, whose fate it is to become involved in predicaments.

The lady of Ardreenan, whose will was the law at home, had never had to apply to the police in her own country. But she had known all her life that it was their business to find people who were lost, and she saw no reason why this should not be equally true in all places and at all times. Whereas the police-officer whom they interviewed represented a force that had been defied by Communist agitation, and rudely superseded by the military. He knew that he could not retrieve mad foreigners who chose to disappear into Oporto in its present condition. That anyone should expect him to, he thought a sign of the last stage of exasperating imbecility. He said so in the vernacular to Señor Garcia; who told Miss Pringle in French that *Monsieur* the Inspector deeply regretted his inability in the circumstances to act.

Had the two principals been able to speak to each other directly, they would have done it with restraint and civility. But, to the go-between, neither of them hesitated to express their feelings freely.

Miss Pringle said that if *Monsieur* the Inspector could do nothing, she would be obliged for the name and address of his superior, so that she might complain of his inconceivable and scandalous inefficiency. The *patron*, translating, said that his client was in dire distress and threw herself on *Monsieur's* kind compassion, begging his advice. *Monsieur* advised him to remove his client to a lunatic asylum, or preferably further. He conveyed to Miss Pringle that *Monsieur*, having given her case the most sympathetic consideration, counselled her returning to the Foz to wait for Mr. West, who was sure to turn up safely sooner or later.

Miss Pringle said that if she must wait she would wait where she was, and not leave till she saw the police at least making an effort to do their duty. She asked to be provided with a chair. The inspector

made a reply which the *patron* rendered as being that *Monsieur* was desolated that he had no chair.

Miss Pringle then waited standing with an air that needed no interpreting. The inspector thereupon made comments which were not susceptible of even the freest translation, except for a final remark that, if the lady wanted to sit, she could do it more conveniently at the head depot in the town. Señor Garcia, near the end of his imagination, incautiously referred to the head depot. Miss Pringle said if that was the right place to go to they had better go there at once.

There they went accordingly, after a little time wasted by the *patron* in explaining the futility of the proceeding. He knew the ways of the trams, which, fortunately or unfortunately, were running better for the moment. He got his client into town without much difficulty, and penetrated with her to the inner recesses of police headquarters.

The official who received them was a long-suffering and kindly man, ready to do anything to oblige. He said candidly that all inquiries that he could make would be equally useless, with the town in its present state of disorder, and that the only effectual thing to do was to go home and have patience. But Miss Pringle's point was that the greater the disorder in the town, the more imperative the necessity for her charges to be found. She held this with a force of conviction that enabled her, by means of the obliging official and his telephone, to stir up the whole police-force, the British Consulate, and the municipal authorities—and all without a qualm of conscience. The civil powers were trying to cope with the victualling and general maintenance of life in a city where everything was on strike and the military commandeered any available transport. In a country less philosophic, a person who intruded into the situation with importunate demands for the instant recovery of two separate foreigners, missing from their hotel

for some hours, would be likely to get into trouble. As it was, the accommodating official had presently to say that he could do no more telephoning. He said that the wires were engaged by the military.

Miss Pringle was nearly worn out. In her secret heart she was equally terrified of the sullen streets and of these hideous male purlieus, full of incomprehensible forms and poisonously infected with cigar-smoke. But when they emerged from the police depot, and the *patron* was wondering how he was to get his exhausted client out to the Foz, she settled the question with unabated firmness. They must go, she said, to that chief civil authority to whom the last kind man had been trying to speak when the military prevented him. She had not understood whether it was the Lord Mayor or who, but Señor Garcia would know. Señor Garcia knew very well that the kind man had been making polite excuses. Nevertheless he took her to the municipal offices, since he had to take her somewhere, and she would not go back to the Foz.

There they waited some time in a desolate corridor, furnished mainly with spittoons, till a person who was probably not the Lord Mayor was produced out of a private room to speak with them. He spoke English, and was very suave and plausible. But Miss Pringle was not so bewildered as not to see that he only thought of getting rid of her.

"But certainly," he said. "If it were possible the whole city should be ransacked for *Madame's* friends. But behold us powerless, we poor civilians. To-day no one can do anything but the soldiers."

"Then the soldiers must search," said Miss Pringle.

The sleek gentleman exchanged smiles with Señor Garcia, and the former asked, with mild raillery, whether she would not also invoke the co-operation of the Communists. The smiles finally roused Miss Pringle, who never liked to be amusing except by her own intention. She said that she did not care who

looked for her friends, so long as they were found. But found they must be, and something must be done at once, and she would not leave the place till someone did it. And she went to a seat and sat down.

Lavinia Pringle had never known that science which Patricia instinctively practised on easy-going men. Patricia could make it so difficult for them to disappoint her that to do her will became the line of least resistance. Lavinia, in her youngest and prettiest days would not have known how; and, if she had, would have considered it the action of what her mother called a baggage. Yet she was not without her own moral effect. There was no practical reason why the suave functionary should be disturbed by her sitting for any length of time among the spittoons in the municipal corridor. But he was disturbed, and turned in desperation to the Spaniard. That law-abiding citizen conceived that the moment had come to be firm. He had about as much wish to be involved with Diaz Galdos' soldiers as he had to escort his client to Red headquarters in the cut-throat depths of the Old Town. He said, therefore, that it was quite impossible for him to remain longer absent from his hotel, and he assumed that she would return with him.

Miss Pringle was in despair. But she would not be moved. At last he went without her, seeing nothing for it but to get the Señor West, whom he confidently expected to find at the Foz, to go and contend with her.

True enough, Pavington was at the Foz at that moment. The cause of his long absence was a letter, which he had found at the Paris, from the resourceful Mr. Russell, who had suborned the hotel staff at Viana to find an opportunity and get it conveyed by hand. In it Jack expressed all the misgivings which he thought he was hiding from Honor, and urged West to make haste and square the head-bottlewasher in Oporto. He added a note that five bob went a

wonderfully long way in this country, owing to the rate of exchange.

Pavington thought that the tariff might have to be raised for the higher authorities. But the first thing was to discover who to square, and how to get at him. He therefore set out on the quest which Diaz Galdos had laughed at Patricia for supposing it possible to achieve in a fortnight.

A morning of fruitless peregrinations and inquiries made the same thing clear to Pavington. It was particularly vain for him to hope to get anywhere, because he was afflicted with a reasonable mind. He could recognise that, in a revolutionary city, there might be things more vital to consider than the plight of two young fools in Viana do Castelo. He agitated apologetically in distracted bureaus, accepted impossibilities as natural, and, by the time at which Miss Pringle and the *patron* left the Foz, had gained nothing except a fairly clear understanding of the general situation.

He had learnt that there was no disturbance so far in the country, so that Honor and Jack were quite safe where they were; that Diaz Galdos had already assured the defeat of insurgence by strong measures, and that order would probably be re-established in a few days. But there was bound to be a clash first. That meant street-fighting and bomb-throwing, and very real danger for civilians who got in the way. It was obvious to Pavington that Honor and Russell might be left at Viana, but that his cousin and Patricia must be got away at once by sea to Lisbon. Lisbon was normal, and there they could get the British Legation to negotiate the release of the others.

He would have made his way straight to Leixoes, to arrange for their passages. But as he turned in that direction, about three in the afternoon, he caught a rumour that the troops were even then closing in on the revolutionary centre, and that trouble might begin at any moment. At that he was seized with a nervous anxiety that drove him first to the Foz. He

knew it for an exaggerated feeling, since the hotel was in a safe position, and—Patricia being wise and Lavinia not adventurous—they were sure to keep strictly within doors. Still he could not be happy till he had seen them safe with his own eyes.

Locomotion was interminably tedious, and there was time for his uneasiness to grow beyond all control of reason. His whole being concentrated on reaching the vine-shaded *patio* where Patricia had come to meet him the day before. But when he got there it was a dead and deserted place, with nothing in it but the tea-things which had not yet been cleared from the little table in the corner.

Then, going into the house, he discovered that both the ladies were gone.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE PROOF OF THE PUDDING——

THEY had gone and left no trace—no note, no message. The *patron* was not there either, and the information Pavington could get from the servants was necessarily vague, as he did not know enough of their language to be sure what his questions conveyed to them.

But the ladies were undoubtedly gone. They were off, into the streets, right away. She of the front room —that was Patricia—had gone first. Then she of the big room—Miss Pringle—in the other direction. At some time, someone or something had come, and there had been—whatever was represented by first two fingers and then three, and an agitation of hands —in the *patio*. Also, at some period the *patron* had gone out. But how these facts hung together it was beyond Pavington to discover.

He went down again to the *patio*, hoping to be able to think in the open air. But he was so stunned that his brain would not work. He could only sit and notice, among the still uncleared tea-things, a terra-cotta jug with drooping yellow daisies in it. It was a trace of Patricia that went to his heart—a sign of that joy in little ordinary things that they had in common. He, too, had noted the daisies with dark-spotted petals at the sea-edge of the road; and jugs like that, with light patterns all over them, by hundreds in domestic use in the back streets. While he looked, he became aware of another extra on the table between the two tea-cups, namely a cigarette-end, which was not Patricia's, since she never smoked, and which he could not suppose to be Lavinia's.

This roused him from his stupefaction. Patricia, then, had had tea with someone, and afterwards gone out in a hurry—a great hurry, or she would not have left her daisies without water. Neither would she have left Miss Pringle, except for a strong reason. The inference was, either that her unknown visitor had brought her the rumour of crisis in the town and that she had thought it necessary to go herself to Leixoes to secure their retreat, instead of trusting him, Pavington, to do the obvious; or that something new and startling had developed. Having nothing to decide him which to believe of these theories but the life-long habit of his mind, he chose the former. The want of confidence in himself on Patricia's part that was implied in it hurt him so bitterly that his heart revolted against it. But in his longest experience it was the probable and the disagreeable that happened, and not the extraordinary.

So, having got water for her yellow daisies, and called himself a fool, he set out to follow her to Leixoes, in the sure expectation of missing her on the way.

What else could he do? It did not surprise him that she should have acquired a visitor. She had a fatal aptitude for accumulating acquaintances. What did surprise him was that she had left Lavinia. Thinking coolly, he found more cause for alarm about her than about Patricia. Patricia was a young woman well able to fall on her feet. But of what Lavinia might or might not see fit to do in any given case he found himself unable to conceive. Her mental processes were peculiar to herself, and quite unbiassed by the usual ways of the world. She might be anywhere at all by now. For Patricia to abandon her to her incalculable devices, she must think him no use at all——

Having got so far in his meditations, and a couple of hundred yards on the way to Leixoes, he raised his eyes and saw his own suitcase coming to meet him on

the head of an elderly woman. It was a heavy leather case, and a lighter one of Russell's was on top of it, and she carried Patricia's and Honor's in either hand. At her side was a young girl similarly loaded with Miss Pringle's luggage. Much surprised by this phenomenon, and perplexed as to what it might portend, he turned and followed the portresses. They were not difficult to keep in view, as they wore scarlet handkerchiefs round their shoulders over white blouses, blue and yellow head draperies, and their voluminous petticoats kilted about the hips with magenta shawls. They went swinging easily under their loads, and turned in to the Foz hotel.

Pavington, turning in after them, discovered the *patron*, just come in and not a little relieved by his appearance.

Señor Garcia informed him that *Mademoiselle* had been taken away in an automobile by the military; that *Madame* had gone in pursuit, and now remained in a situation not very suitable, from which she should be removed by someone to whom she would pay attention.

Pavington wondered sceptically whether he was that person. But he knew it was his duty to find out. He took the weary road to town again; reached the municipal buildings and the corridor indicated by the *patron;* and found no Miss Pringle there.

Having squared some minor functionaries in the manner prescribed by Russell, but with more liberality, he was brought to the presence of the gentleman in the private room. This person at first had difficulty in recalling any foreign lady, and denied all knowledge of what had become of her. But when Pavington casually mentioned that he had a friend among the all-powerful military—that officer with whom he had had dealings while the Portuguese army was quartered at Lowwood in England at the time of the war—the civilian was intimidated, and confessed a measure of the truth.

What had actually happened was that, when Miss Pringle's continued session in the corridor became unbearable, he had insinuated that she might go to army headquarters and inquire there for that military officer who had carried off her friend. When she said that she did not know the way, he had taken her, together with some statistics which he should have transmitted to the military some time before, dumped her on an officer who wanted to know where forage could be commandeered for cavalry horses, and eliminated himself from further proceedings.

The officer in charge of forage was greatly embarrassed. He had his share of the national amiability, but small skill in foreign languages. He explained patiently in his own tongue that there were a number of captains in the Portuguese army, that most of them were called Oliveira, and finally that, being neither hay nor straw, they were no business of his.

But the lady would not understand, so he passed her on to Intelligence.

If she had been less flustered, she might have learnt from Intelligence that one of those she sought had been there before her. But, as things were, the only effect of Patricia's passage was that all work was behindhand and everyone in a fuss. And the only thing they could understand about Miss Pringle was that she would not go away.

For her it was the last resource of desperation to come to the very headquarters of that Diaz Galdos whom she had heard of as a ferocious savage. She was getting more and more frightened and bewildered, but, having ventured in, she was certainly not going out again till her just demands were satisfied—unless removed by force. And to remove her so, no one had the strength of mind. She had an air that impressed. Besides, it stood to reason that no woman would be so bold unless she had influence at her back. Who could tell what might not happen if she were disregarded?

Like all insuperable difficulties, she was ultimately referred to the General.

So, while his unhappy subordinate asked Diaz Galdos to believe that a foreign lady of high rank had suddenly materialised in the forage department, and Patricia imagined cataclysm and disaster, Miss Pringle was waiting, trembling, in the anteroom. By this time, after all her vicissitudes, she was in a state of nervousness that increased with every minute's delay. When she could endure no more—pushed to the extreme of boldness by the extremity of her fear—she opened the General's door and walked in. Then she saw Patricia.

Oh, joy and relief! Her dear, precious Patricia, safe and sound. And—oh, comfort!—Patricia cool, undaunted, and equal to anything. After her devouring anxieties, after the terrors of her campaign alone, the revulsion of feeling swept away the last of Miss Pringle's nerve. She stood, white and shaking, in the doorway, and the astounded Patricia put an arm round her and helped her to a chair.

At the same time, dead silence at the General's table made Patricia realise that her friend, and no external crisis, was the cause of perturbation.

"It's all right about Honor and Jack," she said—to Miss Pringle, but in tones meant to be overheard. "The kind General is just writing out an order for their release."

The kind General, while she spoke, had demolished his subordinate, and was now absorbed in the papers on his table. Miss Pringle had not at first realised that such a little man could be the terrible Diaz Galdos. Nor had she considered how annoying it was, after all she had been through on her account, to find Miss Patricia perfectly happy and at home in the lion's den.

"My dear, what are you doing in this very odd place?" she asked.

Patricia refrained from rejoining that she might ask

the same; and only whispered that the General knew English.

"I have hunted the whole of Oporto for you. I thought something dreadful had happened. I——"

"I'm frightfully sorry," Patricia apologised sincerely. "I never thought of the time it would take. But at least everything is all arranged, and now we must not trespass too long on the General's patience."

She looked round at Diaz Galdos with her most confiding expression. But he was scowling over his papers, and shot out a hard lower lip in a way to suggest that they would not get the opportunity to trespass far.

"Everything arranged, indeed!" exclaimed Miss Pringle. "It's all very well to say that, my dear, but if you will listen to what I was going to explain to you when you interrupted——"

Patricia was longing to know what had brought Miss Pringle here, and where was Bernard. But she knew that Miss Pringle would not get to the gist of even quite a simple explanation in less than twenty minutes, and it was essential that the General's patience should last till the order was signed. So she interrupted again. She said that they could talk afterwards, and were only waiting here till the General had time to write the order for them. She spoke distinctly and suggestively, and Diaz Galdos looked up. But it was Miss Pringle who caught his eye.

"I am sorry if we have disturbed you," she said with perfunctory civility. "But it was not to please myself that I came here. Certainly not!" The whole weight of her condemnation of his reputed brutality was in her tone. "I was forced to come here because I could get no news anywhere else. As I say, it was not to please myself. And I must say, I should very much like to know why, when Miss Fitzgerald was here all the time, though what she was doing I do not yet understand—but as she was here, I should like to know why no one told me! And now I must ask——"

"I am not an inquiry-office, Madam," said Diaz Galdos. "I am occupied, Madam. You may not have noticed that there is a revolution in this town?"

Miss Pringle had never been spoken to like that before. She rose, her face very pink.

"I do know that there is a revolution," she said. "I am not quite foolish. And I think it is quite time there was a revolution, for this country simply isn't governed at all. Your police are useless, your mayor is utterly useless, and as for your army!"

Diaz Galdos was as much taken aback by Miss Pringle's manner of address as she had been by his. Also, physical dimensions count for something. He might not have listened to so much if the lady had not towered above his head.

"Your army ought at least to have some organisation," she said, her pent-up feelings overflowing in frank speech. "I should have thought, at any army's headquarters it would be known what one of its officers was doing. But here have I been an hour at least trying to find out about that Captain Oliveira who brought us here——"

"What? What name?" said the General, seizing his pen.

Patricia laid a warning hand on Miss Pringle's sleeve. But she, who had never been to school, did not understand that she was telling tales.

"Oliveira? What Oliveira?" repeated the enraged General.

Patricia remembered with relief that there had been more of her ally's name. She had omitted the rest from use, not knowing how much might be Christian name. But evidently Oliveira alone was not enough to identify him.

"We had better say no more about the name," she told Miss Pringle. "I had not understood it rightly."

"In any case, it does not matter now," said Miss

Pringle, "since I have found you. The thing to be done now is to find Mr. West."

Patricia and Diaz Galdos exclaimed together.

"There is not another of you?" said the General.

"You heard him say he would be in by twelve o'clock, Patricia, and he had not come when I left the Foz. How can we go to Viana without Bernard?"

"Oh, he's just not come in?" Patricia was relieved. She knew that possibilities of delay were infinite. She was not disturbed; but the General was.

"It is too much," he said. "It is too many. This is the end."

But it was not the end, for Miss Pringle had to explain the impossibility of going to Viana without Mr. West.

"He would certainly have been in when he said he would," she reiterated. "Unless something had happened to prevent him. He must be found. And since you, sir, are in command here, it is your business to find him."

Diaz Galdos was meditating strong measures to convince the lady that his business was something else. But his eyes met Patricia's, and the look that they exchanged was one of mutual appreciation, and not altogether unfriendly. He hesitated, frowning; then dashed a few words on to paper, and handed the note to Patricia with a slight but significant bow.

"The order for the commandant at Viana," he said. "It is for you to do the rest."

"I will, I will," said she, exuberant with joy and gratitude. Almost she had despaired of this order. The General could not have been greatly blamed if he had withheld it.

To Miss Pringle she whispered: "Thank goodness! One's been afraid to think what Honor's feeling all this while. Now we can go to the rescue. Let's waste no more time, but go straight out and see about finding Mr. West."

In her heart she was convinced that Mr. West was well able to find himself. Aloud she said:

"The first thing is to telephone to the Foz."

"My dear," said Miss Pringle, "I must say I think you take it very lightly. What is the good of telephoning to the last place he is likely to be?"

All the same, Patricia's confidence was carrying her to the door. In the doorway they ran into the General's secretary, who brought a note which, with the General's leave, he delivered to Miss Pringle. Her face changed as she read it.

"Mr. West is waiting for us downstairs," she informed Patricia. And after a moment, when she had recovered from her surprise: "You see, he was not at the Foz."

Diaz Galdos had the last word.

"You do not come here to-morrow," he roared after them. "I send a car for you to your hotel."

CHAPTER XV

"CALM AFTER STORM——"

THE car appeared punctually next morning, and they took a regretful leave of Señor Garcia and the Foz, and were driven away northward.

The *patron* had reported the result of the General's operations since they had seen him. Diaz Galdos had occupied Red headquarters, captured several prime agitators, broken the back of the rising in one lively night.

"Your General seems at least to be efficient," Pavington commented gloomily to his cousin.

Miss Pringle's spirits were rising as they left the town behind them.

"He is not my General," she retorted gaily. "I will not be responsible for him. He is Patricia's."

She had forgiven Patricia, and could tease her about the General this morning. Not so Pavington. He had nothing to say to Miss Fitzgerald. He was too seriously displeased with her proceedings. True, she had not gone to Leixoes without waiting for him to do the obvious; but she had plunged off on a perfectly wild and foolhardy adventure without waiting for him to do anything at all. He had not yet recovered from the anguish of mind he had been through from the time of his return to the deserted Foz to the moment when she had appeared out of Diaz Galdos' den with the order of release in her hand.

The crown of her iniquity was that she had been so undeservedly successful.

Time had already shown that there was no need

for desperate measures. A little common-sense and patience, only, had been needed. And he, who had no brilliant gifts—who was, after all, just Pavington—was at least a practical man with plain horse-sense. It should have been his chance to prove his worth, and Patricia's rash enterprise had robbed him of that chance. Patricia was impetuous, reckless, headstrong. He agreed with every word that his cousin had said about her the evening before. He and Lavinia, after all, were blood relations, and had much in common.

It was all very well, he thought, for Patricia to be so thrilled by the market-women and their panniered donkeys; the farmsteads with mysterious pointed stacks set high on poles like brown Noah's-Ark trees; the fat red earth and the oxen ploughing; the vines growing rampant over the hedgerow poplars. He might have enjoyed the run too, if he had not known that the expedition was a folly. They were going far from the port into a country paralysed by strikes. They would have no line of retreat. They might be starved. Certainly the long drive over villainous roads would be too much for Lavinia. Not that Miss Pringle showed any immediate signs of fatigue.

"I must say we judged Portugal too hastily," she said—having done all the judging herself. "It is really worth all we've gone through—now that we're through it—to see this country. What do you think, Bernard?"

"I think there's a tyre going flat," said Bernard from the depths of his gloom. Who knew if they would not spend the night on the road? It was all very well for the others to be so light-hearted. But he could foresee all that they might be in for.

The engine was making disquieting noises by the time the driver noticed his slack tyre. He drew up in the thin shade of a pinewood and set about repairs. He was coal-black. His methods gave Pavington no confidence that they would see Viana that day. He stood and watched the negro's fumbling, and felt his

cousin Lavinia watching him and thinking how much more useful Jack would be in this crux.

But Patricia was filled with irresponsible joy by the delay, which gave her time to get out and explore the forest, and Miss Pringle whispered to him to go with her.

" I won't have her off alone again in this country! And I shall sit in the car and see it doesn't start suddenly and leave us in the lurch."

Pavington shrugged his shoulders, thinking she need have little anxiety on that head.

" Poor dear Bernard," thought Miss Pringle, when she was left alone. " Patricia has been very trying. It is certainly up to her—as they would say themselves—to exert herself a little now and be nice to him. And I daresay she will! " She remembered the softness she had caught at moments under Patricia's black lashes, and felt fairly confident.

In fact, Bernard's mood of pessimism was already yielding to one of complete indifference to sublunary trifles. Miss Pringle was not mistaken in Patricia—nor in reckoning that sunshine is the sweeter after rain. Only she could not know the special triumph that it was for her cousin to find how thoroughly he had shaken himself free of the old Pavington, and how fully determined he was to continue without him.

Loving romance like any Victorian maiden, it pleased Lavinia to imagine—so far as it was quite right and reverent to follow lovers, even in imagination—what it must mean for those two to wander together among the pines, over a carpet of low pink heather, patterned with drifts of dim blue squills and starred with asphodel. How she hoped they would take this excellent opportunity for becoming properly engaged. She knew she was quite justified in encouraging this consummation, for Elinor had confided to her before they left Geraldstown that she suspected a certain mutual interest—very certain, thought Lavinia —and further had told her in confidence that Bernard

had been able to explain about himself at last, and that she and the Colonel were perfectly satisfied with his connections. What he had explained Elinor had not repeated, and it was no business of Lavinia's to ask, though she could not help being curious. It was so funny, seeing what friends they all were now, that he never talked about himself.

But so far as he and Patricia were concerned, if her parents were satisfied, and she herself quite happy to take him on trust, what were they waiting for? As for his head, she did not see that he could expect it to get better than it was. Was he not clever and interesting, and sometimes quite sensible? Of course he was not naturally able, like Jack. He would never have got across the frontier without a passport, or been taken up for a Royalist agent. Neither could he maintain a conversation, like Jack, from the moment he appeared in the morning till he was hunted off to bed at night, and all about nothing in particular. It warmed one's heart only to think of Jack. But that did not mean that she had not got to be very fond of Bernard too. She did hope he and Patricia would come back to her with everything settled.

But, in the meantime, Patricia in the wood was telling Mr. West how important it was that Lord Pavington should stay out of the way; and Pavington was wondering how he should ever resume his real name. He was heartily tired by this time of the alias which tied his tongue. He could not ask Patricia to marry him as West; he could not tell her the truth till he had confessed it to his cousin; he could not reveal himself to Lavinia without upsetting her relations with her agent—and if he did that, Patricia would never forgive him.

So it was that when they returned to Miss Pringle, very evidently reconciled, they brought only a harvest of flowers from the wood and no word of the definite settlement which she expected. Only too soon, after all, the car was repaired and ready. The rest of the

run was without incident, and they reached Viana early in the afternoon.

After the harrowing visions they had had of their young friends in captivity, and the haste they had made to the rescue, it was something of an anticlimax to come to the Central Hotel and find that the prisoners were out walking. The hotel staff smiled when asked for the Señhor Russell; and the urbane commandant, who received the order of release, evidently thought, with Pavington, that here was a great deal of fuss about very little. He said that Viana was a pleasant place, and hoped that the visitors would amuse themselves.

After a belated lunch they accordingly went out to see the town. They were soon lost in a maze of narrow, twisting streets of which no one ran parallel with any other, and which all were resonant with the clattering of wooden shoes over their erratic cobbles. They found many pleasant things to see, and as the town could at the same time look at them, the pleasure was reciprocal. They were attended everywhere by a small crowd which studied their movements with absorbed interest and commented freely, but in an entirely friendly and companionable spirit.

It was Miss Pringle who recognised Jack's voice, issuing from the interior of a rag-and-bottle shop whose door was marked by another assemblage of Viana's less reputable citizens.

" Honor, come on," he shouted from the dark within.

" I will not come in! " Honor's voice returned from the midst of the assemblage outside.

The rag-and-bottle shop was dark, but it might have been darker with advantage. There was light enough to show the choicer wares hanging in mellow and odoriferous folds on strings that sagged from wall to wall—old clothes of a nation that does not discard its garments lightly. The nameless bulk of the stock, piled in heaps about the floor, was happily indis-

tinguishable in the gloom. It was vain for Jack to shout from the bowels of the gloom that it was a frightfully nice place and that Honor would love it.

But the crowd outside burned to know what a foreign young gentleman was buying in the establishment of the Senhora Rosa Candida. Surging in, it bore Honor in too before her friends could get to her. They followed, and their observers followed them, and the ground-floor of the establishment became congested. There was a gallery reached by a ladder —the whole construction of a doubtful solidity—where the mistress of the shop kept her loom. It was there that Jack was, trying to make her sell him the piece of linen he had watched her weaving for her own chemise. Looking down from this point of vantage, he suddenly saw Miss Pringle, West and Patricia, and notified Honor by a yell that they were within a yard of her.

The reunion of the friends lost something in dramatic effect by reason of their being so tightly wedged among the rag-and-bone heaps and the audience. But Jack's demonstrations of surprise and joy moved some of the onlookers to withdraw, and it was ultimately possible for them to get together and exchange assurances that they were indeed themselves.

"Topping your fetching up here," said Jack, when the first excitement had abated. "But how did you manage to do it?"

"Patricia did it," Miss Pringle owned generously.

"Splendid!" said Jack, with tact. "But you needn't have bothered, really. The old commandant chap would have got us off all right in a day or two."

There could be no doubt, however, that Honor was unfeignedly rejoiced and relieved at their coming. When Patricia and Pavington had followed Jack up the ladder to be introduced to the Senhora Rosa Candida, who was like her wares in being very old and dirty, Miss Pringle and Honor with one consent made for the door.

" What about going back to the hotel? " said Honor.

" Let us," said her godmother.

In the street outside Honor frankly shook herself, and advised her Aunt Vinie to do the same.

" It isn't only fleas out here," she explained. " It's bugs."

Miss Pringle's sense of decorum would hardly have allowed her to name the first form of life, certainly not the second, without the veil of some euphemism. Nor was it consistent with her ideas of courtesy to take any such suggestive action as to shake her skirts under the eyes of the Senhora's neighbours. She would endure the utmost horrors of apprehension rather than so grossly offend anyone's presumed sensibilities. But save for these points of detail, her feelings and her goddaughter's were identical; and they found themselves in a state of unanimity such as they had never attained before.

Miss Pringle admired the assurance with which Honor led the way through the bewildering streets. They talked very happily as they went, for each wanted to know what had been happening to the other. With adventures of the same order to compare, on the ground of common experience, they were for once unconscious of their different generations, and really met each other for the first time.

Honor reported that the hotel charged a lot for rotten teas. If Patricia had her etna with her, she thought they might make tea for themselves. They could get cakes on the way, and have it all ready for the others. The suggestion appealed to Miss Pringle. Only she doubted the possibility of making purchases without Bernard to negotiate the *reis* and *scudos*. Honor, however, proved equal to the emergency.

" You just shove a five *scud* note at them," she said. " It's always enough, and we needn't wait for the change. It takes such a lot of *reis* to make a farthing, and the time they are over a bill! They

can't multiply, out here, and say things are so much a dozen. They have to put down the twelve things one by one and add up. Jack generally does the arithmetic for them, and it saves time. But they never cheat you, anyway. Jack says they don't know enough."

"I hope, dear," said Miss Pringle, "that Jack is not getting to be a cynic as the result of his travels?"

"I hope he won't get anything worse," said Honor. "The poisonous places he will go into with a cut in his hand not healed! Enough to give anyone lockjaw."

"I am not very much afraid, dear, of Jack's getting that particular malady. But what about the cut?"

It is possible that their talk got its zest from the fact that they had Mr. Russell to discuss. However this might be, by Honor's summary methods they succeeded in buying a lavish supply of cakes, and, on Miss Pringle's insistence, a variegated assortment of pottery plates and mugs. It amused them both equally to set out an elegant table in the sitting-room which Miss Pringle had secured, as a surprise for the others. And Miss Pringle was justified in her prediction that it was safe to start the etna at once, since Jack was of the party and would see that they did not forget tea-time.

CHAPTER XXVI

COUNTING CHICKENS——

BY next morning Honor had confided to her godmother that she mistrusted the Central Hotel's drains. She did not believe in any foreign drains, as a matter of fact. But that was as near as she could go to saying that the place was infected by the presence of the half-caste subaltern who looked at her every evening during dinner.

The upshot was that Miss Pringle decreed an immediate removal; and that Bernard won great kudos by discovering the Hotel da Monte Santa Lucia, on top of the mountain that stood directly over the town. Thither they all ascended triumphantly in a funicular tram, which moved at a solemn pace, in keeping with the proprietor's proud boast that it was the only wheeled thing functioning in all Portugal.

Patricia was sorry to leave the town, with its gay pedestrian traffic. But there was a fresh and exhilarating air on the mountain-top when they got there. From the balcony running the length of their new quarters she could look straight down the chimneys of the town, and southward for miles along the mountainous line of coast, with its white sand-rim. She could watch the Viana fishing-craft slip out to sea from their harbour in the estuary, and see, far out, little wooden three-masters from Oporto creeping on their way across the Atlantic to fetch the stinking cod from Newfoundland which fed their country and poisoned the streets below. Inland she could follow the river-boats, nosing up between the flat, green islands that

broke the river into a network of channels. Travelling very slowly under their great square sails, even those that did not stick on sandbanks took a long time to reach the point where they disappeared behind a wooded spur that cut dark against the mountains enclosing the valley. The wood was of round-topped mimosas, just coming out all over a yellow that made Patricia think of young chickens.

She discovered all these things in the intervals of unpacking for Miss Pringle, and was moved to fling her arms round the latter lady's neck when she wasn't expecting it, to thank her for bringing them to this glorious place.

" As, of course, I had arranged to do from the beginning," Miss Pringle remarked, with her gentle irony.

She got even more entertainment than did Patricia by looking down from the balcony, since with her longsighted eyes she could see more, though she complained that they were growing dim.

" What an old stupid I've been, all these years," she said, " not to think of getting some of you to come with me to places like this long ago."

" Never too late," said Patricia.

The older woman sighed, and looked away across the sunny valley and down the long, shining line of coast. Patricia wondered anxiously what she was thinking. Perhaps—that late is late, and that it is sad to wake in the evening and know one has missed the morning. To Patricia, in the full radiance of her morning, it seemed that this must be an intolerably dreary experience, and she did not know if it was as clear to Miss Pringle as it was to her in the light of her happiness that there is no real ' too late,' no end of life and growth, no limit to hope——

" What I was thinking," said Miss Pringle, " was, what a pity it is that everyone isn't more like Jack. He is quite equally happy, I believe, wherever he is, so long as it isn't a bank. If everyone were like that it

wouldn't be so difficult to find any one place to suit five separate people. As it is, I'm afraid my poor Honor isn't enjoying herself here as much as you and Bernard and I."

This sent Patricia flying into the room that the girls shared, determined that Honor should enjoy herself whether she wanted to or not. She found Miss Percival meditatively regarding a square of tangerine-coloured silk with blue and green spots—one of the kerchiefs which had once been part of the Sunday costume of every woman of Viana. Patricia knew all about it. Had she not encouraged Jack to buy it the evening before, not guessing for whom he wanted it?

"Awful, isn't it?" said Honor.

Patricia disagreed. She loved its glowing orange, sprinkled with cool flecks of jade and blue by a designer who had a soul. To Honor she pointed out that it was old silk, wonderfully supple and strong.

"Put it on, and see how becoming it is," she counselled lightly.

Honor had not asked for her advice, and did not take it. She continued to consider the gift dubiously with her mouth open. Patricia, absorbed in her own feelings, had nearly missed the significance of the moment. But she knew her companion's drooped lip for a sign of thought, and thought on vain matters of colour and becomingness was so strange in Honor that it arrested her attention. She realised suddenly that Honor had grown up, and that a momentous question lay folded in that tangerine kerchief.

Jack liked giving, largely and in a lump, at least as much as he liked saving halfpence. But Honor hated accepting. And by her downright code—Patricia divined—she would hold herself bound, if she accepted the gift, to accept also the giver. Patricia thought Honor did well to think and say nothing, and as that was clearly what Honor intended to do in any case, she abstained from further advice and went away.

Having been told nothing, she deemed it no breach

of confidence to share her observations with Miss Pringle.

"But, my goodness gracious!" said Miss Pringle. "They aren't old enough to think of anything like that."

"They aren't thinking," said Patricia. "Dear things, they don't think. If they did, they'd realise that with Jack's position quite uncertain——"

"My dear, we need hardly go into all that yet."

Miss Pringle did not like to hear it taken for granted that Jack's position at Ardreenan was so uncertain. Her imagination was already ranging over a possible happy solution of the problem on which she had begun to brood in the last years. What was to become of Ardreenan when her time came to leave it?

It would be silly to bequeath it to her next of kin, Pavington, who had as much property already as he could look after satisfactorily. And she did so dislike those poor Pringle-Deanses, who played bridge and called the Ardreenan neighbours "quaint." How much better for an old family name to die out in peace than to be carried on to contempt by a degenerate branch! Her third cousins, the Pringle-Deans, lived in Hampstead, and kept—or rather did not keep—one maid. They could not, perhaps, be expected to understand about a place in the country. A place like Ardreenan, which gave employment and had tenants and pensioners, was not just a possession to be done with as one liked. It was a little State, as important to its own people, and as sacred a trust in the hands of its rulers, as a kingdom or a republic or an empire. Honor and Jack were both very young and very foolish, but they both understood this essential thing, and there was the difference between them and *other people*.

It would have been an effort to Miss Pringle to think that a right understanding of essentials could be combined with the habit of playing cards by daylight—if she ever had thought of the general apart from the

particular, which she never did. She thought of Jack, and how proud he was of the place already, and as interested in all its little ins and outs almost as she was herself. And she thought of that long-ago, unsuccessful visit from her Hampstead cousins, when they had said so much about the possibilities of her reception-rooms, and seemed amused when she said she had not time to entertain. Honor, with all her faults, did know how much there was always to be done in a country house, that was bound to be free dispensary, relieving and registry office for all its neighbourhood. Honor would never have said, like Mrs. Pringle-Deans: "But how deliciously feudal!"—words which had rankled through a dozen years, and would rankle still while Lavinia Pringle was of mortal clay.

If the place could be passed on, happy and prosperous, to hands that would cherish it as a trust, she would feel that she had not lived in vain. So dreamed Miss Pringle, while Honor wrestled in her soul with the yellow handkerchief, and Patricia and Bernard West trod the same enchanted path among the mimosas, and listened in an exquisite communal silence while Jack discoursed of extra tillage at Ardreenan and of the relative merits of stable- and bag-manure.

Lavinia went in presently to her godchild with an unguent in a little china pot.

"You should really take more care of your skin, dear child," she said, "in this hot sun. You don't want your nice neck burnt red."

Honor would sooner have been flayed than put anything near her skin but soap and water—preferably honest kitchen soap at that, and none of your disgusting toilet brands that smelt. She looked on the china pot with disfavour.

"It is very pure," Miss Pringle assured her. "But if you do not like, dear, you need not use it."

She would not have made that concession the day before. But to-day she knew that currents of life

unknown to her were reaching her godchild, and would surely sweep her out soon into the great main-stream of reality. She felt a new respect for Honor, and allowed her a choice about the care of her own complexion. Honor, reacting, declined the emollient with unusual graciousness, and thought it rather decent of Aunt Vinie to go on bothering about her, now that she had Patricia. Honor had been in opposition all her life, only because she had always been defending her liberties from her godmother's aggressions. It was not that she had not always been fond of Aunt Vinie; and now, in the queer discomfort of not knowing what she felt about that thing of Jack's, she was strangely glad of a comfortable, motherly presence in the room. She even did not shake herself when Aunt Vinie laid a soft hand on her shoulder.

CHAPTER XXVII

BIRDS, NOT OF A FEATHER

FOR more than a week, while strikes and disorders reigned, they were cut off from the world on the top of Monte Santa Lucia as effectually as if they had been cast away on a desert island. However, Monte Santa Lucia was no desert, but covered luxuriantly with yellow and white rock-roses wherever it was not sheeted with pink heather. There were rarer blossoms to be found by those who searched, and Miss Pringle searched diligently, and infected even Honor with excitement over each fresh find.

For nineteen years Lavinia Pringle had wasted good moral precepts on her goddaughter, in vain attempt to fulfil her sponsorial function. She did more for Honor's soul in these ten days, when by example and practice she taught her the great lesson of enjoyment. Honor would never have found her own way to enjoying her pleasures visibly, nor to enjoying new and strange things in any fashion at all. Whereas her godmother was enchanted with all that was strange and new. Among things newest to her was the experience of being herself a stranger, and not Miss Pringle of Ardreenan, and therefore free to climb rocks if she felt like it, and poke with Jack into queer places in the town without anyone thinking it odd.

The town was a place of infinite resources.

After ten halcyon days the first sign of returning normality appeared in the main square, in the shape of a wheeled vehicle complete with three mules and actually moving, though not rapidly. It had a roof on four posts, and baize curtains of a shaded dirt

colour bulging over the backs and baskets of its cargo of peasant women; and it was rather down on the springs at the shady side. This was the diligence normally connecting Viana with outlying villages, and the sight of it thrilled the travellers who were craving means to explore the country beyond their walking range.

Jack would have booked their places at once for a journey to the terminus, and was hardly restrained by West, who might not have been so decided if he had not had an alternative scheme in his own mind. It occurred to him that, if the road was open to the diligence, it would be open also to the hotel's comfortable seven-seated car. He aspired to arrange a really successful and delightful excursion which should efface the memory of the day before, when he had chartered one of the river-boats admired by Patricia to take them across the estuary to the sands that shone so fair as viewed from the hotel balcony. The boat had gone aground on several mud-banks—always a matter of indifference to the owners, as they said the tide would float them off when it returned. It was mainly owing to the exertions of himself and Jack that, after extensive wadings in the mud, they reached the further shore. They found the sands, or at least a large portion of their knife-edged particles, whirling in the air before a stiff sea-breeze. There was nothing to give shelter but a few thistles, and one stone behind which even Patricia could not boil a kettle. So they were fain to return as they had come, and make their tea in the boat while waiting for the tide. It was a voyage full of incident and exhilarating variety. But the organiser felt that a more orthodox success on the morrow might dim the memory of the stale fish and bilge-water which impregnated the boat, and so cause his cousin Lavinia not to hold them up to him for ever after—in which hope he under-estimated the consistency of his cousin's character.

That evening a train came in from the south, and

presently a new guest appeared in the hotel. Jack, discovering in him a fellow-countryman, had made his acquaintance and introduced him to Honor before the others came in.

Miss Pringle always changed for dinner, and did not hurry over the operation, thinking it well for the young people sometimes to be left to their own devices. When Patricia, ready long before her, went out on to the dining-room verandah to watch the sunset, she saw Honor leaning on the terrace parapet with a young man on either hand. The new young man had a black bullet head and the type of good looks usually associated with the barber's block. But Patricia, studying him with some attention, judged this specimen to be not lacking in strength of mind, and rather astute than vacuous. She did not like him, but he interested her, and when Bernard West came out on the verandah too, she turned to him with a whispered question:

"What is Jack's friend doing in Viana when he ought to be enjoying his holiday on the pier at Brighton?"

"How do you know he won't enjoy it here?" he countered in the same tone.

"Oh, by the shape of his nose."

West gave his usual careful consideration to the feature in question. It was abrupt, and strongly planted on the face with thick, coarse wings—not a nice feature.

"Is it fair," he said, "to judge a man by his nose?"

Patricia usually liked her fellow creatures of all classes. But when she did object to an individual, she did it thoroughly and at once. Bernard's patient tolerations were beyond her.

"You must go by something!" she said.

He smiled down on her indulgently. They must talk low, not to be overheard, and it was a reason for standing close to Patricia in her rose-coloured evening garb under the rose-sprays that shaded the verandah. She smiled back in the shadow, indulgently too, for

she thought how draughty his mind must be if it had always to be kept open about everything.

"Are you never sure what you think of anyone?" she asked.

"Quite—about some people," he answered with a sudden decision and meaning that startled her and turned her eyes away to the three on the terrace below. But she did not move.

The stranger was evidently already in possession of the main facts of Mr. Russell's life-history, for as Patricia gave her attention to them, the former was saying:

"I wish you'd tell me how you got the job. I've a friend wants to get a start in the land-agency line, and it don't seem so easy."

"Oh—er—as to that——" said Jack, wriggling in discomfort.

"Not much good Mr. Slater's friend going in for it if he doesn't know something about it," Honor put in, speaking for the first time.

"That's it," said Jack, relieved.

Mr. Slater changed the subject, and asked Miss Percival if she had ever had her fortune told by her hand. Honor said she had not indeed, and sniffed. Then he admired her sense in not believing in such stuff, and they were getting on quite well by the time Miss Pringle appeared in the dining-room.

"Five of you!" said Mr. Slater. "What an awkward number for a party! Only less bad than one. There's nothing gives me the hump like sitting down one to dinner."

At a sign from Miss Pringle, Jack ran up the verandah steps to her, to explain his new acquaintance. He was a Londoner stranded in Portugal, and finding it awfully slow by himself, poor beggar, and mightn't they ask him to their table? Miss Pringle looked down at Mr. Slater's alert bullet head, and seeing that he must have heard, said without enthusiasm that she supposed for to-night they might.

Having won his place at the usually cheerful table by the window, the stranger certainly worked hard to pay his footing with agreeability. He might have worked more skilfully had he had more attention to spare from the rose-coloured vision of Miss Fitzgerald. As it was, his efforts were rather blighting in effect on everyone but Mr. Russell. He was also boringly obsessed with the case of his friend who wanted a land-agency. Having gained little useful information either from Miss Pringle or Mr. West during the meal, he buttonholed the latter afterwards to ask advice on a different head. He explained that he had just arrived in Portugal on a matter of business with an English firm in Oporto, to find that no business could be done till conditions were more normal. So he would have to hang about in this beastly country for the Lord knew how many days. Where was there that one could go, and what could one do? What, for instance, did Mr. West himself think of doing? Not, surely, of staying on in a hole like this Viana, which he, Slater, would never have come near if he had known what it would be like.

Mr. West was sympathetic. Slater might be a crass young man with an unwholesome turn of mind, but it was probably the fault of his education. Pavington was genuinely sorry for the object of Patricia's aversion, and anxious to be helpful. He advised Mont Estoril, in the far south, as a very pleasant watering-place.

Mr. Slater averred that he would go there to-morrow if it were not for the journey. But travelling abroad was the devil, even when there were trains. He was not an experienced traveller, and would really like to tag on to someone who knew the ropes, like Mr. West did.

Mr. West said it would be a real pleasure to him to escort Mr. Slater to the station on the morrow, and arrange all the details of his journey to the south. But Mr. Slater thought he would wait a day or two, anyway till the train service improved.

Next morning Slater knew all about Mr. West's arrangements for a motor expedition. He had himself thought of engaging the car, it appeared, for just such an outing, which was the only conceivable way of putting in time in this hole. Indeed, he let it delicately be understood that he had waived a prior claim to the said car in favour of Mr. West. He would not for the world upset Mr. West's little plans.

Mr. West began to wish that it were not his little plan. Someone else might have had the courage to ignore Mr. Slater's suggestive allusions to the sixth seat in the car. But, as it was, Mr. Slater occupied that seat.

The trip did not, however, turn out such a one as he might have planned for himself. It was no straight run to somewhere where there were refreshments, but a devious exploration of the whole surrounding district. They loitered endlessly in villages where the inhabitants still wore costumes, while Patricia took photographs with the little camera which was the joy of her heart. They stopped between whiles to get into fields and investigate agricultural methods which Mr. Russell judged to have survived the Flood. They followed Miss Pringle through rocks and brakes after flowers.

Slater took part in all these divagations. He would have done better if he had avoided jostling Miss Pringle in his haste to help Miss Fitzgerald through the first gap. For Patricia turned her back on the gap and him with the energy which characterised her movements, and thereafter had a difficulty in perceiving his presence. So he devoted himself to Honor again. By degrees even Patricia's heart softened to him, seeing how manfully he strove to look as if he were enjoying himself; how unremitting his smile, as he stood about in hamlet streets, or leant on the fences of fields with his hands in his pockets, saying at intervals: "How cute!" and when that threatened to become monotonous: "How snappy!"

Nevertheless, his weariness hung on the spirits of

them all, and his alien presence blighted all their laughter. It became ever clearer that, compared with to-day, the adventure of the sands and the river-boat must shine as a bright success. The responsible West accordingly sank ever deeper into a fit of the unusual gloom which accorded so unfortunately well with the sullen caste of his features. Slater, watching him, thought him a sinister character, and wondered that even the ladies could believe in him.

It was an altogether ill-fated occasion. After tea they left the comfortable lowlands and got among the hills and the starved hill villages, whose squalor made Patricia miserable. The children in the streets pounced hungrily on food-scraps thrown to them in paper bundles. There are compensations everywhere, and if the others had been attending to him, they would have seen that Mr. Slater found here the one gleam of genuine amusement of the day—rolling up empty greasy papers into promising packets and throwing them out to be scrambled for.

CHAPTER XXVIII

GIVE AN INCH——

THE following day Slater got the ever-obliging Mr. Russell to go down with him to the town to see if the post office was open yet. Jack wanted Honor to go too, but she said it was too hot. She had enjoyed the advantage of Mr. Slater's society most of yesterday, and to-day preferred to sit on the terrace with Mr. West and have her mind improved with Celt-Iberian history out of a guide-book.

The post office proved to be impregnable—held still by the military; and the two young men returned to the hotel, Slater arriving first because he preferred to ascend in the elevator rather than engage in a walking race up the all-but-perpendicular two kilometres of avenue for the sake of exercise.

Arrived at the top of the hill, he made a circumspect tour of the premises, and found Miss Percival alone, inspecting the hotel chickens under the mimosas to the northward. He joined her, and proffered a posy of pink roses which he had brought from the town because he said they made him think of her.

The lady held the roses at arm's length and inspected them critically. She said they were the ordinary monthly kind, and she had lots of them at home, only better.

He remarked with surprise on her being by herself, and further remarked that he had seen Mr. West with Miss Fitzgerald on the terrace at the other side.

"Funny about that man's memory," he went on. "I've just been hearing all about what happened." He indicated the base of the hill where he had parted

from Jack. "Heard who picked him up and took him in when he was half dead. You'd have thought a man would remember who saved his life!"

Miss Percival showed no human sign of interest.

"Of course, memory's a tricky thing," Slater pursued undaunted. "I'd a friend lost his after an accident. Didn't know me from Adam afterwards, and when a perfect stranger came along he thought it was his brother! Funny, wasn't it? I suppose it wasn't like that with your man? He didn't think every new caller was his oldest pal? Russell, for instance, that time they met first at your place?"

"Who?" asked Honor.

"Russell."

"Who?" she repeated with a calmly blank expression.

"Your young friend—er—Mr. Russell."

"Oh!" said Honor.

"How did—er—Mr. West act with him that first time? He was the first to go to see him, wasn't he? I'm really interested."

"H'm," said Honor, giving her attention to a hen-coop. She had been brought up by Mary Reddy, who had impressed on her the standards of the countryside. By these, undue interest in other people's affairs is not allowed. Honor could hear Mary calling Mr. Slater "ignorant"—that direful word of opprobrium called forth only by the grossest forms of ill-breeding and ill-behaviour.

Miss Pringle arrived on the scene at this juncture, having from a window beheld the strange young man presenting flowers to her goddaughter. She was glad now, on approaching, to observe that Honor was offering the roses to a hen to peck. She summoned the girl peremptorily to come for a walk with her, and they started down the avenue to meet Jack, leaving Mr. Slater with the hen.

"Dear," said Miss Pringle, "one does not wish to be rude. But I do not care for that person, and do not think we need prosecute his acquaintance. In

future when you meet it will be quite enough to bow to him."

"Quite," Honor agreed. "He'll do the rest."

Jack met them round the second turn, rather heated, having broken his own record up the hill. He brought no roses for Honor, but only loud reproaches for some people's beastly laziness. She retorted that of course he had forgotten the methylated spirits; and as, on the contrary, he had got it cheaper at a new shop, she said it must be the wrong stuff, and required the bottle to smell. Miss Pringle, observing the two sets of brown fingers meeting for a moment round the bottle, wondered whether these were truly the ways and the language of lovers, or if Honor was what Jack's barbarian tongue would call talking through her hat. She left them together on chance, and returned to the hotel to speak to the proprietor about a table in the dining-room which should not hold more than five.

Entering by way of the terraced garden to the south, she discovered Mr. Slater bending over Patricia's hand in an attitude of unmistakable devotion.

There was no excuse for Patricia. It would have been no trouble to her to quell Mr. Slater and all his skill in palmistry, without being rude like Honor. And she might have done so, instead of graciously accepting his homage, if Bernard West had not been there to see. But it amused her to test his toleration.

It did not amuse Miss Pringle. Nothing about Mr. Slater amused her; and she thought that she had her hands very full, and that she would have to remove her flock from Viana, and that it would be a great comfort when dear Patricia was safely married to Bernard.

She thought these things more decidedly when Captain Oliveira arrived by motor before lunch-time, and they had to revert to the table that held six.

Captain Oliveira reported that the pacification of the country was now complete, gave a flourishing account of his General's health, in response to Miss Fitzgerald's solicitude, and explained that his own

nerves had collapsed in reaction after the crisis, and he had had to apply for a day's leave to recover in the soothing air of Viana. He was thus in the happy position of being able personally to remit to *Mademoiselle* a letter, undoubtedly from *Monsieur* her father, to whom he had had the honour of cabling her address care of that useful cousin of his own on the staff, according to arrangement.

In the agitation of their last evening at the Foz Miss Pringle had failed to notice this arrangement. After luncheon she spoke to Patricia privately, saying she trusted the ordinary post would soon be working again, and that she would be able to relieve her parents' natural anxiety without laying herself under further obligations to young foreign officers. Patricia unfortunately was not constituted to realise the enormity of the obligation. She said Captain Oliveira was an amiable officer who liked obliging, that she would do the same for him in Ireland, and that she had invited him to Geraldstown.

The interview left Miss Pringle quite decided that it was time to go somewhere else, and only embarrassed as to what motive she could adduce publicly for a removal.

There was a second letter which Oliveira delivered with less enthusiasm than the first. It was for Mr. West, and proved to be from Mrs. Fitzgerald, but he did not divulge the fact to the others. Mrs. Fitzgerald wrote:

"It may interest you to hear that Lord Pavington, who has been missing since the 4th February last, is now known to have been murdered that night at Liverpool. The fact has been brought to light, it seems, through some evidence which a Mr. Findon, assisted by our Mr. Henry, has collected in and around Kilcashel. There is now a warrant out, signed by Mr. Henry as Peace Commissioner, for the arrest of Jack Russell, presumably on suspicion of this crime. The startling news has only just reached us, sent by a

friend of Jack's who prefers to remain anonymous. He says that Mr. Findon is to be back in Kilcashel at the time when Jack is due there to give evidence about the dead cow. In the circumstances it would be rather unfortunate for him and Lavinia to come home unwarned, so I am writing to you. It looks as if the simplest thing would be for Lord Pavington to come to life."

Pavington took this letter away to meditate over in the solitude of the woods. At first he found it hard to apply his mind to the problem it presented, because a vision of Findon and Henry in double harness would intrude between him and all serious thought. When he could fix his attention, however, it was easy for him to work out Findon's probable line of action—much easier than it could be for Findon to follow the line which had brought him, Pavington, here.

Remembering that Henry had in his possession that fateful paper which had got lost at Brogsford, it was obvious to Pavington how Russell had come under suspicion. He felt that he could answer now the question which Patricia had asked on first sight of Slater. Slater would be here as an emissary of Findon's, trailing Russell. He might be a private agent sent to shadow him and give warning of the moment when he turned towards England. He might also be a police officer with an extradition warrant in his pocket. The latter possibility set Pavington thinking in earnest.

It would not be pleasant to have Russell arrested on suspicion of murder. It would be unpleasant for Russell, in the nature of things, and Lavinia would see that it was unpleasant for everyone else concerned. An arrest must by all means be avoided.

It would, no doubt, be quite simple, as Mrs. Fitzgerald said, if the victim of the crime came to life. But to Pavington's mind his resurrection out here presented practical difficulties. He had no proof of his identity. The last shred of evidence was that hankerchief which he

supposed he had remembered to burn at Derry Lodge. Mrs. Fitzgerald's hasty letter was signed only with initials, and dated from a nondescript address where she and the Colonel were staying with relations in the west.

There was only one man in Portugal who might possibly identify him—that officer with whom he had fraternised to some extent during the war-time, when the Portuguese army was unpopular in England and he had to do with its supplies. But that was years ago, and Ferreira might remember him or he might not, and Pavington's modesty inclined him to expect the latter alternative.

Later, he inquired for his friend of Oliveira, and learnt that the Colonel Ferreira d'Almira da Silva held an important post as commandant of Coimbra, a strategic point on the main line to Lisbon from the north. This strengthened him in his conviction that the Colonel would have forgotten his existence.

On the whole, he decided, it would be simplest to throw off the sleuth, who seemed rather zealous than subtle, get home before he had time to make trouble, and report to Findon at Kilcashel.

He finished that letter of overdue apology to Findon, which had never yet got posted, and entrusted it to Oliveira's good offices, but without any very strong confidence in its reaching its destination. The next thing was to induce Lavinia to alter her plans without explaining things that were better unexplained for the moment.

In reality, Slater was only the employee of a private inquiry agency, who would not have got the job but that he had connections in the country and knew enough of the language to get about. He had been put in like a ferret down a rabbit burrow at the first relaxation of the control of ports and frontiers. Being an aspiring junior, he thought fit to improve on his instructions, which were to keep the quarry in sight and report when he could. He sought to do detective work besides, and to gain lights on the relation between

West and Russell, in which he saw the key to the whole business. In the first half-hour he had taken the measure of Mr. Russell's foot, and estimated it to be the foot of a fool rather than a knave, those being the only heads under which he classified humanity, except that all women were cats.

When Oliveira had gone, Patricia, Honor and Jack conjointly took Mr. Slater for a walk and lost him in the wood. Returning themselves by that western face of Monte Santa Lucia, which is slippery and overplombs the sea, they returned to the hotel in riotous spirits, which the other two were not disposed to damp, since they all felt Mr. Slater's absence like a normal interval in a malady. Miss Pringle and her cousin had been walking on the terrace in an uneasy silence, mutually embarrassed, and hesitating how to broach a project of flight.

It was then that Jack caught a woodlouse—not the shiny kind that rolls up, but the dusty-slate-coloured variety that only wriggles on its back. He gave it to Honor, particularly requesting her to observe its strong facial resemblance to the other Slater who had evidently been called after it.

"Disgusting brute!" said Honor. But she received the many-legged specimen on her palm with an almost sentimental tenderness, since it was the very same as those she was wont to put her foot on when she found them in the garden at home.

Jack submitted that it would be a delicate attention to the two-legged Slater to place the other in his drinking-glass for dinner. But Miss Pringle vetoed the proposal, on the ground that it would be unkind to the insect; and even the charitable Bernard declared that in any case it would be thrown away, since the biped did not know enough of anything worth knowing to recognise his prototype by name.

It was this woodlouse, and the reaction to it of the whole company, which finally decided Patricia that something must be done. For herself she could not

too soon be rid of Mr. Slater, for she had promptly repented the impulse which had made her encourage him. So now she repeated the alluring descriptions that Captain Oliveira had given her of Coimbra, that strategic point which was also an old university town with two cathedrals. Why, she said, should not they alter their plans and go there? It was all on the way to Lisbon, where they were to pick up a boat for home.

Thus was their course cleared for both Pavington and Miss Pringle. Both acclaimed the suggestion, and Pavington carried it further, saying that Lisbon appeared, from the guide-book, to be a commonplace city, and why should they not travel home through Spain and France, taking the Sud Express at Coimbra? To this also Miss Pringle assented with enthusiasm. She was not in love with sea-voyaging. And they worked out the new plan then and there.

Mr. Slater knew—from Jack—of their original intention to stay at Viana for a few more days till it was time to go for their boat. Even Miss Pringle agreed that, without deception, he might be left in ignorance of a change which was no business of his. So preparations for departure were made with elaborate secrecy; the servants bribed and the proprietor cajoled to be silent; tickets, place-tickets and permits from the military secured in time for the train that left for Oporto at an early hour in the morning, before Slater had any excuse to be awake.

It was better organised than the escape from Kilcashel, and more amusing, since they all were in it. But Mr. Slater was at the station to see them off.

He remarked to West on their limited luggage, and said that they were travelling very light. West said it was a good thing to do. He went and made the same observation to Mr. Russell, and Russell said of course they had to pick up some more stuff in Oporto. Slater said it was a pity to have to miss the through connection to Lisbon; and Russell said that they didn't—at least, that was to say—anyway West had got it all arranged.

CHAPTER XXIX

LEAST SAID——

THEY found Oporto recovering from revolution with an ease and speed probably acquired by practice. But the railway service was still too much restricted to allow of their getting on to Coimbra the same day, and they spent the night at the friendly Foz Hotel. Miss Pringle had the same room in the low-browed old part of the house to the rear, and could enjoy now with an undistracted mind the amenities of the cool back street on which her windows opened. On the former occasion she had been glad of the heavy oaken shutters and iron bars.

Just opposite there was a wine-shop, marked by a noble bush, where the pacified proletariat sang all night to the accompaniment of a three-stringed mandolin. Then, when the revellers' wooden shoes had clacked homeward in the morning, the cries of the vendors of household supplies began. Oil came round in a jingling contraption of cans on the back of a mule, and was advertised by the tootling of a horn that the merchant carried; fresh rolls and shrimps and cabbages swung by in baskets on the heads of women, each sending her particular call re-echoing before her up the street. Neither Miss Pringle nor Patricia could identify the milkman; but there was a cow, which emerged with some sheep from a doorway not far down. Then came the knife-grinder, fluting a tune on panpipes. Finally Mr. Russell's head, rather ruffled, out of the window immediately above the kitchen door—a tradeswoman, announcing her arrival there by a sudden, rousing whoop, having

startled him from the depths of unconsciousness. Her white-napkin-covered basket swayed as if poised in air just below him, and he was moved to detach a scrap of mortar from a joint in the granite cornice and let it drop. Whereat a live hen got up, indignant, from among the eggs and lettuces under the napkin, and Mr. Russell's head was hastily withdrawn from public view.

Miss Pringle said at breakfast time that they should come here again next year; and meanwhile, what about a day to see Oporto, and going on to Coimbra on Friday?

The suggestion pleased everybody except Pavington. Mr. Slater, being out of sight, was out of mind with everyone else, and Pavington could think of no stratagem to meet the occasion and prevent dangerous loitering. He feared he had not been born to be a successful general, and was tempted for the thousandth time to confide the whole ridiculous imbroglio to Patricia. But his cousin had a right to the first explanation, and the moment was particularly unpropitious for telling her. Patricia was now convinced that if once the affair of Jack and Honor were definite, Miss Pringle would consider that the ultimate advantage to Ardreenan of having him and Honor as joint heirs outweighed his lack of experience as agent. It appeared, therefore, that the solution of the whole matter hung on the rate at which Honor could make up her mind; and it did not seem to Pavington a promising position.

They stayed at the Foz, and spent the day going round the town, coming out in the evening by the river-side—a desert when they had passed that way before, now thronged and cheerful with gay-garbed, hustling women unloading ships, and peaceable men and ox-teams removing the cargoes.

Progress along the quays could only be gradual, since the ox-carts, which had been at the root of the recent troubles, set the pace at which traffic must

defile through the lane that was left clear of mounds of cargo. Pavington, looking back along the line of halting trams and taxis, caught a glimpse of something that was very like Mr. Slater's face. He was not surprised, for he realised that a force of five conspicuous foreigners could not be difficult to trace, even by Slater's elementary methods. He could only hope, in the three days remaining, to gain sufficient start of the pursuer to slip back to England before him.

They went on to Coimbra next day, and there it rained—not steadily, but in gusty sluices, as if water were being flung out of buckets on the town, till its steep streets ran like mountain torrents, and the wide parade in front of the hotel became indistinguishable from the wide, muddy river beyond it. Clouds swallowed the hill on which stood the university and the two cathedrals, and the river poplars writhed in the wind.

Pavington was almost glad of the shrouding rain, for he was haunted by the thought of the emissary of the law stealthily tracking the unsuspecting Russell. Also he was haunted by the fear of encountering the commandant of Coimbra—that genial soul—who might, after all, remember him. He was anxious enough to get quit of his disguise, but not to have it torn from him suddenly by a shout in the street. The sudden did not appeal to Pavington. He would have to explain when the time came, carefully and delicately, first to his cousin, next to Patricia, then to Honor, and lastly to Jack, how it was that he had come to deceive them all.

The rain stopped the second afternoon, and on the third day the hill of the university stood clear against a radiant sky. The sun shimmered in the trees by the river, and gilded the country beyond. The river was vocal with a thousand frogs, and all the washerwomen of Coimbra were out, bare-legged, wading and chattering and washing assiduously in the mud.

And Patricia's camera came out again from her coat pocket, where it made an unnoticeable bulge.

She photographed an arch of the Roman viaduct, that spanned the road by which they went up the hill to the college, at the moment when a troop of cavalry came riding under it. Mr. West recommended her to hide the camera as the troop passed, as he had seen suspicious looks cast at her proceedings from the distance. He pointed out that it was not likely photography would be allowed within the precincts of a military post of strategic importance; and as Patricia had secured what she wanted, she suppressed the suspected object cheerfully.

The old college stood on the verge of a cliff, and the view was clear to-day over the town and far down the valley, where the main-line railway bridge crossed the river at a conspicuous point, as the custodian pointed out with pride. Patricia wanted more photographs here, but the law-abiding Honor made her observe that the place was full of soldiers, and that the railway bridge was probably strategic.

The place was full of portraits of the university's founders in their ruffs and gowns, and Honor had soon had enough of it. Mr. West took pity on her, and went away with her to the botanic gardens not far off. Miss Pringle and Jack presently wandered off towards the rendezvous at the hotel. They thought Patricia was with the others, and the others thought she was with them, and Patricia, in fact, lingered behind to take her photographs in peace.

Jack discovered a way into the hotel through the garage yard at the back which was shorter, coming from the hill, than to go round by the front. Entering so, Miss Pringle made for the dining-room to secure a table in the window for tea. But she drew back from the door and silenced Jack, who was behind her, by a sign. When they were safely away, she said:

"We must go somewhere else. THAT person is in there!"

She had recognised Mr. Slater's silhouette against the front window, where he commanded the entrance to the hotel and the way to the railway station.

"What! The old woodlouse!" Jack exclaimed, much amused.

"I call those creatures carpenters myself," said Miss Pringle. "It is a nicer name. But—I never heard such impertinence as his following us here to Coimbra. Of course he only came because he heard Patricia talking of it with that Captain Oliveira."

"After all, though," Jack opined, "there's room enough in Coimbra."

"No," said Miss Pringle. "Mr. Slater has no business here. He will want to travel to London with us, and I will not have it. We will just go out and intercept the others, and keep away from here till it is time for our train."

Personally, Jack thought these precautions exaggerated. But if his employer chose to play tally-ho round the by-ways of Coimbra, it was not for him to object. They went out as they had come in, and separated to watch the different ways of approach, Miss Pringle not without qualms at finding herself alone in the streets among black soldiers, policemen with sabres, and young men in college gowns who embraced each other when they met. She was thankful that it was not long before Bernard appeared, having been caught by Jack and sent on to report to her.

Pavington was actually relieved that Slater had been sighted. It gave him the advantage, to know where the sleuth was. He congratulated himself that the heavier luggage had been left for the *patron* of the Foz to consign direct, and that the hotel people here did not yet know at what hour they were going to the station. It was, however, clear that there was no hope of getting any train at Coimbra station unknown to Slater. He had no difficulty in gaining his cousin's consent to a plan he had devised, which was that they should go by car to Pamfilhosa, the

junction to the north where the up and the down trains crossed. It was early still in the afternoon, and they need not start for an hour, and could meanwhile get their small baggage out quietly by the back door, see it into the car in the garage, and arrange for the car to pick them up somewhere in the town.

Jack and Honor now joined the conference, having been to the garage meantime to choose the best car.

"But where," said Miss Pringle, "is Patricia?"

"We were going to ask you that," said Pavington. "She was with you."

"No, surely she went with you to the gardens."

"Not with us."

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Miss Pringle, much annoyed. "She'll have got down to the hotel while we've been talking. She'll certainly be having tea with Mr. Slater."

They adjourned in confusion to the garage. Thence Honor and Bernard, as the steadiest of her available forces, were detailed by Miss Pringle to reconnoitre the hotel. They returned in ten minutes with the luggage, but with no Patricia. There was nothing for it but to send the fleet and resourceful Mr. Russell up the hill to search the university.

He came back in half an hour with a beaming countenance.

"Well, where is she?" demanded Miss Pringle who was growing anxious.

"She's gone and done it this time," said Jack with an unfeeling grin. "She's a prisoner of war all right. The soldiers have her in a guard-room place up there, and they're waiting for an officer to come round to court-martial her for taking photographs. I saw the camera——"

"What did I say!" said Miss Pringle in despair.

"You said she'd be having tea with Mr. Slater," Honor reminded her.

"It is all the same thing. I will never be responsible for Patricia again. What did you do, Jack?"

"Cleared out as fast as I could, before they jugged me too," explained the gallant Mr. Russell. "I couldn't make the silly fools understand. Besides, they'd confiscated the camera, and Patricia wouldn't come away without it——"

"Bernard must go and see about it, then," said Miss Pringle.

"That was what I was going to say," Jack concurred. "West can parley the dagoes. And meanwhile the rest of us might go and get a spot of tea."

On his way up the hill Pavington had a distinct recollection of having brought to Miss Fitzgerald's notice the inadvisability of taking photographs. He also clearly realised that his nicely calculated scheme of evasion depended on their leaving Coimbra in not much more than another forty minutes. He thought that if Mr. Russell knew what depended on their evading Slater, he might not find the cause of delay so very amusing.

Unlike Jack, Pavington found the sergeant of the guard a receptive person, especially in the matter of greasy paper money. He could see the prisoner without any difficulty. But it was in vain that he burdened his soul with the assertion that the lady had no idea that photography was prohibited. The incident had already been reported to headquarters.

Pavington thought of the long road to Pamfilhosa, and grew desperate. He inquired where he could find his friend, the Colonel Ferreira d'Almira da Silva. The sergeant informed him that he need only stay where he was, for the Colonel was expected any moment.

Pavington had not bargained for this. He had reckoned that the name would be enough, and foresaw a difficult situation if he should now fail to recall himself to Ferreira's mind. There was nothing for it, however, but to hope for the best, and to wait with Patricia under guard in the shady college arcade. The waiting seemed endless to him, with his hopes of

Pamfilhosa diminishing minute by minute. Patricia should have been full of penitence, and she said she was, but she did not look it. It was he who was really oppressed with a sense of guilt as he confessed his rash appeal to Cæsar.

The Colonel Ferreira d'Almira da Silva, when he arrived in his car after no long interval, proved to have grown corpulent and important almost beyond recognition.

"Are you sure this really is your friend?" Patricia asked, looking dubiously at the oleaginous mass of consequence in the car.

"Oh yes, he used to be my friend, and a very good fellow, too. I shall never forget how good-tempered he was over the stores that always worked out wrong."

The Colonel, meanwhile, stared blankly at the Englishman indicated to him by the sergeant as one who claimed to know him.

"What is his name?" they heard him say. "How can I know a man without a name?"

Pavington went forward hastily, hoping to be able to mention his name without being overheard. But hopes of a private word were vain. The arcade was shallow, and the sergeant with the camera, the rest of the guard and Patricia, formed up behind in a semicircle to watch. He wondered whether it would be the more dramatic development of this scene if Ferreira disclaimed him, or if he acclaimed him as Pavington.

"Ferreira," he began with the most familiar air he could compass, "I do not think you remember me!"

"But no," said the Commandant, and the frown of a new authority darkened his brow.

"Have you forgotten Lowwood, then?" Pavington named a dismal camp of the time of the War, acutely conscious of the audience's eyes on his back. "Lowwood and the stores, Ferreira?"

"Never those stores!" exclaimed Ferreira. "But

it is not—no, but it cannot be—you my friend, my ancient ally, who dealt with the stores?"

He flung himself from the car and embraced his ally and kissed him on both cheeks; whereat the sergeant and the guard were much impressed, and so was Patricia.

"But how are you changed that I did not know you!" he pursued, thinking of the lame man whose patient labours had unravelled the complexities of the Lowwood stores with such unfailing exactitude; who was never in those days mixed up with young women and the infringement of regulations.

"Well, it is lucky for us that you had not quite forgotten me——"

"But surely I had not forgotten you, my friend—my friend—my dear friend——"

In vain Pavington strove to think of something to say to forestall the name that was coming. While, equally vainly, the Colonel strove to remember a title he had never been able to pronounce. A very English title beginning with a P. Impossible to recall for certain. But one did not give oneself away. He interrupted himself, looking over his friend's shoulder at the lady with the camera, who was surely new.

"—Is it not so that one must offer felicitations?" he ended.

Pavington would have been more relieved at this turn if he had known how to respond. He did not like to say: "Not quite yet." But, seeing confusion shifted from himself, the Commandant chuckled archly and diverted the conversation yet again to the camera, of which as he noticed the lady had already regained possession.

Pavington introduced them, and there was no difficulty at all about Miss Fitzgerald's liberation. Ferreira was only charmed to play the deliverer. He drove them down the hill in his own car, and on the way remembered, with great conviction, that his dear friend's name was Perkins. So all was well.

CHAPTER XXX

NOTHING VENTURE, NOTHING WIN

MISS PRINGLE was waiting more or less patiently in the tea-shop which Jack had arranged for a tryst. She had forgotten Mr. Slater in the agitation over Patricia, and it was discovered that she had also forgotten her umbrella in the hotel.

"It's no matter," she said. "For we may just give up Pamfilhosa."

But Honor said that the umbrella must be fetched, so that they should be ready in case—and that she would fetch it, since Jack would be sure to give them all away. She had just warmed up thoroughly to the game of dodging Slater, now that the others were tired of it. She would not let them countermand the car—which should by now be waiting for them round the corner—and arrange tamely to go for the train at Coimbra.

"We've one day's margin, anyhow," said Jack, and sighed, thinking of the disagreeable business that called him to Kilcashel.

"Miss Pringle," he said when Honor had left them, "West said I'd better not bother you about it till after the trip. But I'm leaving, you know, and we ought to set about finding a new agent as soon as we get home."

"Jack," said Miss Pringle, "I thought I had told you that you could not leave till my cousin, Pavington, is back. Then "—she sighed in her turn—"I know he will make what arrangement is wisest about the agency."

"But don't you remember I asked my mother to

find out, and Lord Pavington isn't expected back for a year? You don't want me at Ardreenan for a year, making howlers like that cow?"

Miss Pringle was at a loss what to say. She did not consider it would be good for Jack to tell him that his general intelligence made up for an occasional cow.

"My dear boy," she said, "if you expect to go through life without ever making mistakes, you will be disillusioned."

"I know that," said Jack—though as a matter of fact he did not. "But you really oughtn't to wait for old Pavings—Lord Pavington. We can advertise."

"My dear Jack! Take someone one knows nothing about, from an advertisement in the papers, for Ardreenan!"

"I'd see he was all right, of course," Jack promised.

"No. I don't believe in these advertisements. I will only have someone properly recommended by my cousin."

"But look here, Miss Pringle, you sent to old Pavingstones for his personal recommendation once already, and look at the result!"

Miss Pringle looked at it, in the person of Mr. Russell, very sunburnt and very serious at the other side of the table—and knew that her life would be desolate without it.

"That is no reason," she said, "for you to put your elbows on the table. Nor yet to take liberties with my cousin's name. It could not, of course, have been his fault, however it happened, and I have entire confidence in his judgment."

"I'll have to tell her about the old humbug," thought Jack, feeling for his pocket-book which still held the envelope addressed to "Finder."

"It is no use your fishing out documents, my good boy, for I will not look at them till the trip is really over. We will now change the subject."

As she spoke, the shadow of an arrival darkened the doorway.

"This will be Honor with the umbrella."

It was, however, Patricia with the Commandant. Pavington escaped the onus of introducing his friend by lingering outside to look round the corner for the hotel's large red car which should have been awaiting them and which he could not see. The gallant airs of Colonel Ferreira d'Almira da Silva did not commend him to Miss Pringle. She received him with a very constrained politeness, and told Patricia that they had not another moment to lose in getting away from Coimbra.

She despatched Jack to the hotel to hurry Honor. But he did not accomplish the errand with his usual expedition, and in the meantime the Colonel filled the shop with his exuberance. Ten minutes, and he had accepted an invitation from Patricia to Geraldstown. A quarter of an hour, and Miss Pringle would have sent Bernard after Jack, if she could have borne to be left unprotected with a foreigner who had begun by kissing her hand. Then at last the other two arrived in a state of great wrath and disgruntlement.

"If that bounder hasn't commandeered our car!" Jack burst forth, enraged. "We saw it going round to the front, and they'd had the cheek to take our things out and put in his beastly bag!"

"Slater," Honor explained, aside to Mr. West. "And Jack made a row in the hotel that he could hear if he was this side of Oporto."

"They had the face to say it was our mistake, thinking we could have that car, and that Slater'd booked it already. And they haven't another you'd touch with a fork, and they've sent us up a sardine-tin that'll burst when we all get in."

There was not time to consider the situation further, for at this point Mr. Slater happened in, radiant with surprise at meeting his old acquaintances.

He mentioned that he had recognised Russell's voice in the hotel, and gathered that they were in a fix about getting to the station. So he had hurried after

to say that he had a car, and would be delighted to give someone a seat—if Miss Fitzgerald would honour him?

Patricia turned from the Commandant to smile sweetly on Mr. Slater.

"How very thoughtful of you!" she said. "You haven't got your car here? It would be very kind if you would go and fetch it along from the hotel."

"Don't mention it," cried Slater, much elated. "Russell, you just run down and get it up, will you! You know the car."

"Oh, thanks awfully," said Jack, taken by surprise. "But I've just been to the hotel. I'm tired!" And he sank upon a chair.

Pavington made haste to say that he would run down for the car, and Slater paid him the compliment of treating his offer with suspicion and deciding to go himself. When he was out of sight, Patricia said it was time to get off in the sardine-tin.

"But, my dear!" exclaimed Miss Pringle. "When you have accepted that young man's offer of a seat—though indeed it surprised me that you did!"

"But I never accepted it," Patricia pointed out. "I said it was very thoughtful of him to make it. Now he will be still more thoughtful when he comes back and finds us all gone."

Pavington meanwhile had been conferring apart with his friend Ferreira, and had obtained from him some impressive words on paper.

"We need not," he said now, "leave poor Slater to come back and find no one here, for I think the Commandant will be so good as to wait for him."

"Yes. And see that his papers are in order," added the Commandant, with a chuckle that boded obstruction for Mr. Slater. Ferreira was charmed to show his authority and do his ally Perkins this small service—to delay for a vital half-hour the young and handsome rival on whom the fair Senhora smiled too sweetly.

They left him ambushed in the tea-shop, packed as best they might into the smaller car, and were soon clear of the town on the way to Pamfilhosa.

"We should have our old *cabalhero* here," said Jack to Honor, looking at the road ahead, which was like a rough sea of churned red earth. The hollows were brimmed with water after the rain, so that their depth could only be ascertained by driving into them, which the driver did with phlegmatical nonchalance. When the plunge was fiercer than usual he glanced round smiling, to see if anyone had been thrown out. And indeed the lighter articles of luggage were in some danger. He drove at a speed that was high for the circumstances, and, in Jack's opinion, left altogether too much to chance.

"If the ass would keep one wheel on solid ground," he criticised, as the car swirled half round in a greasy pool. "He'll have us bogged before we're through."

It was at the head of a straggling village street that they stuck at last, verifying Jack's prediction. Both driving-wheels went into a hole and failed to come out. The driver was less affected by the occurrence than were his passengers. They alighted, and he set his engine running hard, and the wheels, churning helplessly in the hole, worked deeper into the mud, which was up to the hubs in the end. The car, with its nose pointing obliquely at the westering sun, presented a foolish appearance, and Miss Pringle suspected that her party did the same, stranded on the roadside with its baggage.

At least their plight did not lack public recognition. First came the children, scudding on bare feet, the swifter for being encumbered with little in the way of clothes, and that in tatters. There was indeed one four-year-old whose trousers were a handicap, being hitched over one shoulder with a precarious piece of string. He was passed by all the others—who swarmed out of doorway after doorway down the street till its whole length was alive with their running—but arrived

all the same, and helped to line the opposite side of the road, where they all stood staring.

Next came the mothers at sedater pace, keeping their breath to laugh with. Finally the men, who all looked down the hole, while the women gathered behind the car and pushed.

When pushing had proved of no avail, farm implements were brought which combined the quality of pick and spade, and two men lethargically cut away the wall of the hole before the wheels, till in time it was sloped off enough for the car to climb out, after many efforts and with much shoving from behind. It was an interesting process. But Pavington kept looking at his watch.

"Jack," said Patricia, while the driver packed the baggage in again, "if we're to get to Pamfilhosa, you must drive."

"Right-O," said Jack. "You can explain to the beggar."

Patricia explained to the chauffeur quite simply by indicating Mr. Russell when he was planted in the driving-seat, and the man subsided philosophically beside him, and contented himself with pointing out the way.

Beyond the village the road ran on a causeway raised above wet meadows. In places it was hollowed to a cup, full of mud and bulging for collapse into the marsh at one side or the other. It was necessary to take these places at high speed. For the rest, Jack did not maintain the fine pace at which they had gone before, but drove steadily and skilfully, avoiding snags and sloughs. Patricia was on the occasional seat just behind him, where she could look out over his shoulder and give him a general line while he attended to immediate obstacles. Only she could make him hear above the noise of their going, for everything that could shake loose about the car was rattling. The road was growing worse and worse, and Patricia was alive to the finger-tips with the joy of adventure.

"We must leave the issue in their hands, Bernard, and trust to Providence," said Miss Pringle, rather breathlessly.

"There doesn't seem much else to do," said he. "As we can't turn on this road, and if we could shouldn't be able to pass Slater's car, which is just behind us."

"Following!" exclaimed Miss Pringle. "The astounding impertinence of that young man! Really, if he meets with a serious accident on this road, I shall find it hard to be very sorry for him."

Pavington thought it well to mention the pursuit to Patricia, and she told Jack, and he increased speed to the limit of safety. They left the causeway and climbed a hill, dipped and climbed again, but Slater's more powerful car was still overhauling them. When it was in their tracks close behind, Jack slowed down suddenly, hoping to disconcert the other driver, and Patricia stood up for a good view of what lay before them. A little way ahead was a dyke that ran right across the road. It was partly mended with furze-bushes, whose snagged stems bristled out in a *chevaux-de-frise*. The obvious ford for vehicles other than ox-carts was in the middle, where there were no bushes.

"It looks pretty deep there," said Patricia to Jack.

"She can't be expected to take timber," said he.

"Could you get through the gap at the far end?"

"With luck."

He swung across the road at the last moment. Going slow, so that if the car upset it should do it discreetly, he ran the wheels on one side up the bank, while the others floundered into the slough, and with an effort out again.

"Good!" said Patricia. "The others are charging the middle."

The big car's nose dived into the dyke and came out again, pitching high as the rear wheels plunged. It struggled like a live thing, and Jack halted at a

little distance to see what would happen. When he saw it safely settled in the slough he drove on.

Nearing Pamfilhosa the road improved, and he was able to make up time. It was as well, since they could see the Lisbon train already in the station, waiting for the north-bound express, which was fortunately late.

Mr. Slater, however, was not the young man to stick in a hole indefinitely, and his high-powered car made up more time than the other. The two cars arrived in the station-yard together just as the north-bound train came in.

"W'y, here we are again!" Slater called out, in renewed surprise at sight of his acquaintances.

But the soldiers on guard outside the station kept him while they examined his papers at leisure, and let the other party through at first flourish of a special pass from the Commandant of Coimbra. They had time to get to the further platform and find their seats before he disengaged himself from the station-house. The Lisbon express was just in act to start. Through the windows of the two trains they had the pleasure of watching the pursuer hurl himself in to be borne away southward.

When they were comfortably under way without him, Honor proceeded to put fresh labels on all the hand-luggage, and her godmother observed for the first time that the original labels were largely inscribed: Lisbon.

"Mr. West and I put them on in the hotel," she explained. "We were sure Slater'd ask the servants where we were going. I meant to change them in the car——"

"But, Honor," said Miss Pringle, "that was very like deliberate deception."

"He needn't have known if he didn't ask," said the disciple of Mary Reddy.

"Well, my dear, I do not really know whether you and Bernard, or Patricia and Jack, have treated poor Mr. Slater the most disgracefully."

PART V
KILCASHEL

CHAPTER XXXI

MANY A SLIP——

ON Tuesday evening they reached London. Jack was to go straight to his home, Miss Pringle and Honor going with him as far as Tiddon Magna, where they were to stop to make acquaintance with the Russell family. All three would cross to Ireland on Wednesday night, since Jack must be in Kilcashel on Thursday.

But Miss Pringle was in a dilemma about her return to Ardreenan. She knew nothing could be ready there, as she had not been able to send the necessary separate letters of minute directions a week beforehand to Murphy, Lanktree, Hayden, the cook, the coachman and the gardener. They could not be expected to manage with no more notice than a telegram from Paris, and she feared that they would all be much upset.

Patricia solved the difficulty, saying that of course they must come to Geraldstown, and Honor too, while Ardreenan and Derry Lodge were being aired. There would be ample time for Geraldstown to get ready. They would only arrive at midday on Thursday, and she herself would get home Wednesday night. Her parents would not yet be back, but she had wired to Kitty, and all would be well. She need not even alter her plan to stop the night with a cousin in London and travel on by day.

Mr. West had a little business which he said would occupy him till next week, when Miss Pringle expected him at Ardreenan. Where he would be meanwhile he did not say. Jack asked, and his question was evaded, and Miss Pringle and Patricia exchanged impatient looks. They were getting tired of this reticence, and

had no belief that there was any reasonable reason for it.

When the contingent for Tiddon Magna had left, Pavington meant to telephone to Findon's office to make sure that he had really gone to Kilcashel, as Mrs. Fitzgerald had said. But Miss Pringle's large box of necessaries, which she had never opened and which had been left in the end for the *patron* of the Foz to send back direct to London, had not arrived. Pavington spent romantic hours with Patricia searching for it in different station purlieus. Then he had to meet Patricia's cousin. Patricia explained him, aside, as a connection of the Babingtons. So the cousin talked about the Babingtons, and said they were home from abroad earlier than usual this year, she believed because a daughter had to have her appendix out, but they did not like it spoken of. Thereon Patricia, with the jerk of the head that signified her vigorous displeasure, said that they had not time for these ridiculous mysteries in her family. And Pavington was so much perturbed, guessing that her displeasure included him, that he never thought again of Findon till he had nearly missed his train at Euston. It is probable, however, that he would have found three minutes in which to ring up the office if he had been very anxious to spare himself a premature journey to Kilcashel, for he had not forgotten to wire for his room at the 'Fitzgerald Arms.'

He would be there a day before Lavinia. He would have plenty of time to clear up the little misunderstanding about Jack, and could put in the rest of the afternoon pleasantly, walking out to Derry Lodge. He had a gift for Mary Reddy, chosen with much consideration, and was anxious to know if it met with her approval. He could look after Honor's henhouse, and see if Mary would give him tea in her kitchen—that rare privilege, reserved for the favoured few.

So Pavington calculated in his simplicity, as he got out next day at Kilcashel station. But before he reached the 'Fitzgerald Arms,' in the main street of

Kilcashel, he was arrested by the Civic Guard and charged with the murder of the Earl of Pavington at Liverpool on the night of February the 4th.

This was not what he expected, and he told the sergeant of the Guard so, but mildly, since it was not for him to be indignant with those who sought to bring his own murderer to justice. He asked if he might see his solicitor, Mr. Findon, whom he hoped to find in the hotel.

The sergeant, with the air of a man surprised at the cheek of another, said that Mr. Findon was not in the town. Pavington saw that he must explain for himself.

"I am really sorry," he said, "that you should have had so much trouble over Pavington's disappearance. If I had known sooner, I could have prevented it, for you see, it happens that I am Pavington."

"Oh, you are, are ye?" said the sergeant. "Anything that you say may be used against you."

"I fail to see," said Pavington, "how that particular fact, which I can prove, can tell against me in this case."

"If you can prove it, prove it, me lad!" said the sergeant. "But we'll be travelling towards the barracks all the same, before we have a crowd in the street."

"Here's his proofs," volunteered one of the assistant guards, producing the passport which he had taken from the prisoner's pocket.

"That," Pavington explained, "was taken out by special arrangement with the British Foreign Office."

"Go along and tell us some more!" said Sergeant Dunne, with a lapse into facetiousness that was unusual with him and much appreciated by all the onlookers.

"If you don't believe me, will you allow me to send a telegram to Mr. Findon in London?"

Sergeant Dunne told him that he could make application to do what he liked to the District Justice when he was charged before him.

"In the meantime," Pavington persisted, "can I not see Mr. Henry?"

The Sergeant smiled, for he knew that the murderer would not find Mr. Henry sympathetic. Dunne was a sober-minded man, inclined rather to drab than to lurid views. But he was human, and the unusual importance of his capture elated him, and predisposed him to think the worst of his prisoner. He marched him to the barracks without allowing further parley, and locked him up in the cell.

CHAPTER XXXII

WHERE THERE'S A WILL——

PATRICIA reached Geraldstown rather late that Wednesday night. Passing the Farrellys', she saw a light still in the window, and went in to report to Mrs. Farrelly about her children.

The mother listened with almost perfunctory interest to accounts of Peter and Mary Agnes on the ship, and their messages and promises to write. She was not trained in the ways of keeping contact once the bodily presence is removed. The children were gone, and that was all about it, and one must not quarrel with the Will of God.

"But, Miss Pat, isn't it terr'ble about that poor lord that's dead?"

"What lord, Mrs. Farrelly?"

"Ah, you didn't hear. It was some name—but I couldn't rightly remember it. Was it Flavin? Or McCaffernon?" There was no Mary Agnes now to prompt her. "But, anyways, he was some relation to that lady you had above."

"Not—not Pavington?" exclaimed Patricia in dismay.

"There you said it. God help him, what did he want to go carry about twenty thousand pounds for, and he travelling? He was made away with, Miss Pat, and the money taken, some place off in England, and nothing known till they got the body in the river, and it riddled with bullets."

"How did you hear? Was it in the papers?"

"Ah, no! They're keeping it dark till they catch the ones that did it. Amn't I waiting up for Mick now to

see will he have heard any more. It was he heard it from the girl that's in Henrieses', and Mr. Henries would know, for the poor lord's lawyer was over with him. They do say he was looking to buy a piece of the town, and likely it was for that the lord himself went to bring over the money that got him his death. Oh, dear, oh! I thought of that poor lady when I heard it."

Patricia thought of Miss Pringle too, as she went out again and on, to be welcomed by her jubilant small sisters. It was long before she slept, thinking of the blow that this news must be. She could not hope that the story was quite unfounded. And Pavington was Miss Pringle's only near relative, and meant so much in her life as someone always to fall back on, though she had never seen him.

Patricia was up betimes, as there was the whole house to be got ready for her visitors. But early as it was, she had hardly begun breakfast with the children when she was told that Mrs. Farrelly was in the hall in a terrible way. Sure enough, she found her friend weeping.

"God help the day! We're all destroyed, Miss Pat, without you can do something." She had her son with her, but she spoke as if he were not there. "Mick's gone. The poor child—the last one I have. He's done. And all by his own foolishness over that woeful letter that I told him to give to you."

"The one the goat ate?"

"Miss Pat, it was the twenty thousand pounds they stole off the lord that was in it! Who's to say now it was gone before ever the poor child touched the letter?"

"Well," said Patricia, "if Mick hadn't told me silly lies about it I might have advised him at the beginning."

"D'you mind that, you gom!" said Mrs. Farrelly fiercely over shoulder, for a moment recognising her son's abject presence in the shadows.

"Tell me now exactly what has happened," Patricia commanded.

"Oh dear, oh dear, oh! How'll I tell you, Miss Pat, and he such a lovely man and so kind and so good? It's Mr. West they've taken up for shooting the lord."

"Nonsense!" said Patricia.

"God help us, it's true. They have him in the jail in Kilcashel. And Mr. Henries was telling Mick he might look out to get a subpœna for the trial."

"All nonsense," said Patricia. "You needn't worry about Mick, or Mr. West either. I'll go into the town and see Mr. Henry."

Having reassured Mrs. Farrelly to some extent, she finished her breakfast, devolved the settling of the house to Kitty and Rose, wrote a note for Miss Pringle, caught the early train for Kilcashel and arrived there in a high state of wrath. Patricia did not like stupidity, and she judged that Mr. Henry, the Civic Guard and Bernard himself must be equal idiots to have brought things to this pass.

Entering the town by way of Lower Main Street, she was hailed by Mrs. Royce, who with Mrs. Jephson and Miss Dora Twomey was holding an indignation meeting in the doorway of Finn's shop. They told her it was true that Mr. West was in the lock-up, and they said it was a disgrace to Kilcashel. They said the doctor and Mr. Jephson had gone at once to offer bail, and been refused, because it was a capital charge. They further mentioned that it was Mr. West who had originally applied, through Lord Pavington, for the Ardreenan agency, and been turned down, and that was why he was supposed to have shot the earl for spite when Jack Russell got the job.

"It's what Mr. Henry would have done, and he judges by himself," said Mrs. Royce, who was a fiery partisan.

"He wouldn't have the spunk," said Mrs. Jephson.

"Mrs. Henry would—give her her due," said Miss Dora, who always inclined to charity.

"Of course Mrs. Henry's at the bottom of it all—she and that awful Mack woman."

Mrs. Royce was glad she had not spoken to Mrs.

Henry, since she said the things she did about Honor Percival. Mrs. Jephson had not spoken to her since long before that—not since she as good as said that she, Mrs. Jephson, had made away with the best cakes at the bazaar tea because she, Mrs. Henry, came late and did not get any. Dora Twomey was ashamed to own that she had said good morning to the sinner in the street quite recently. Patricia said that it was all ridiculous, and that she was going at once to see Mr. Henry.

She did not find him in his office, and was told that he had gone to Ardreenan to inquire for Miss Pringle. But when she came out, Mrs. Jephson was waiting to say that he had been sighted going into his own house. So she went there, and was told that he was over at the office. Nanny Shane, however, yielded to firmness, and finally showed her into the parlour, where Mrs. Henry and Mrs. O'Mackesey were in continuous session, these times of excitement, behind sealed windows and drawn curtains.

"Glad I am to see you safely back." Mrs. Henry greeted her in a tone which Patricia considered offensive.

"Poor Miss Pringle, though!" exclaimed Mrs. O'Mackesey, whom her patroness did not fail to introduce.

"Yes. Poor Miss Pringle! She's coming home to queer things."

Neither of them succeeded in concealing her enjoyment of another's adversity. Patricia did not know how it was that these two sour women had spun the thread of mischief that led to the present entanglement. But she was aware of an unwholesome moral atmosphere in the room as well as a great stuffiness and want of daylight. Her conscience wondered uneasily whether she might not have broken the boycott that left these two to stagnate like a pestilent pool. But, if she were to blame, she did penance sitting listening to the tale of the world's wickedness which they unfolded till the moment came when she could without incivility demand to see Mr. Henry on business.

"I don't know is he in," said the staunch Mrs. Henry. But Miss Fitzgerald did know, and had to be taken in to the back room, where the lawyer received her squirming. It was his fate, Mr. Henry thought, always to be doing disagreeable things. Findon should be here by rights, and what would it matter to Findon to offend the Geraldstown people?

"Mr. Henry," said Patricia, "you are a sensible man, and will be able to clear up this preposterous muddle the Civic Guards have made."

"Well, now, Miss Fitzgerald, you should go to the District Justice, and not me, you know."

"Do you happen to know who signed the warrant for arresting Mr. West?"

Henry wrung his long fingers together.

"Miss Fitzgerald, if you knew all the circumstances, you wouldn't blame me for doing my duty. I'm not saying Mr. West mayn't be able to explain how he came by one of the bank-notes that were robbed off Lord Pavington's body, and why he cleared out the minute he heard Lord Pavington's solicitor was coming over. I don't say it wasn't a coincidence his being on a train connecting with the Liverpool boat that night. But there are the facts, and you want to remember that no one here knows a thing about him before he landed off that train. To be sure, I daresay you know what'll clear up everything, Miss Fitzgerald——?"

Miss Fitzgerald knew no such thing. But she did not look with the less sternness on the unhappy Mr. Henry. Seeing, however, that appearances against Bernard West were more circumstantial than she could have imagined, she was glad to remember that he had his place in the comfortable network of family connection that holds all Ireland together.

"Well, Mr. Henry," she said loftily, "I can refer you to Sir William Babington of Boyle Abbey, whose relation Mr. West is."

Henry stifled an ejaculation. He had known the Geraldstown people would be formidable, but had not

dreamed they could have so devastating a fact as this to drop on him.

"If I'd been told that before," he groaned. "By—by—to be sure, I'll wire to Sir William."

"The sooner the better," said Patricia. And she went out, feeling that she had accounted for Mr. Henry.

The next thing was to see Bernard himself, to tell him that Boyle had been summoned to the rescue and find out what more could be done. So she made her way through the fair-day crowd in Main Street to the Square, where stood the barracks. Not far from the door she encountered Mr. Andrew Mackesey, casually strolling. Being slightly acquainted with him as Jack's understudy, she stopped to greet him and see if he happened to know if the Sergeant were in or out. Andy happened to be accurately informed of all movements at the barracks, and told her the Sergeant was away, but would be back any minute.

"Did Miss Pringle come home with you, Miss Fitzgerald?" he inquired, with just perceptible interest.

Patricia had not thought how time was going. Looking at her watch, she exclaimed that indeed Miss Pringle must have arrived at Geraldstown West by now.

"And Mr. Russell along with her?"

"Yes. He comes straight on in the train to Kilcashel, if you want to see him?"

Mr. Mackesey's outward expression gave little indication of his inward feelings. But Patricia sensed that the sight of Mr. Russell in the town just now was something he could very well dispense with.

"He has to be here for the Assizes and that case about the man who had the cow," she reminded him.

Andy smiled faintly at mention of the case.

"It's a week since that was settled out of court," he remarked. "I'd have let Miss Pringle know if I had a had an address."

Patricia remembered that Jack had sent the wires from Paris and London, which had been the only com-

munication with Ardreenan. Naturally he would not have wasted good pence on giving temporary addresses.

"At any rate it will be a relief to Miss Pringle that you've got that business settled," she said.

"As to that"—he deprecated so crude a statement—"I just happened to get talking to the fella along the road, and I took it on myself to give him ten shillings. He wouldn't have got that from the court, to be sure, but he's a poor man right enough, and it isn't Miss Pringle would grudge it to him. He wasn't out to annoy her at all at all, nor the young one either. The whole thing was—poor Henry!" The subtle lines of Mr. Mackesey's countenance crinkled with amusement in spite of himself. "Henry was after the fella for trespass, the time he was running the place, and the fella thought it was Henry he'd be tormenting, bringing the action!"

Seeing understanding in Miss Fitzgerald's eye, Andy permitted himself a brief chuckle, but immediately became serious again.

"It's a pity Miss Pringle would come back to-day, and things as they are. I'll tell you," he confided in lowered tones. "There's torments come from the hand of God, but there's more come from the tom-foolishness of Parties. And it would go against you to see the like of her getting annoyance of that sort."

"Yes," agreed Patricia, "it will annoy her very much indeed, their arresting Mr. West. And can you tell me whether Mr. Russell is involved in this ridiculous business too?"

Between the Henry house and the Square she had evolved the probability that it was Jack's possession of Lord Pavington's signature which had led suspicion to Kilcashel.

Andy looked behind him and around, and sank his voice to the pitch of deepest confidence.

"I'll tell you what it is, Miss Fitzgerald. I've seen different parts of the world, but never one that had a man too many that had sense in it. Is the Colonel coming home?"

" Probably to-morrow."

Andy whispered: " Miss Pringle should have waited till to-morrow."

While Patricia pondered this elucidation of the state of affairs, Mr. Mackesey cocked his eye.

" Isn't it a wonder some of us would fit under our hat," he observed, " and we as big in ourselves as we are! "

Following the direction of his eye, Patricia was aware of Sergeant Dunne crossing the Square with all the air of a man who has caught a murderer. She intercepted the officer. But, being duly impressed, did not put forward any bald demand for an interview with his prisoner. Instead she told him that she had been with Mr. Henry, and that Mr. Henry was communicating with Sir William Babington about Mr. West. Her lifted eyebrows invited the Sergeant to be amused with her at the thought of how the great Sir William would laugh to hear that a connection of his own was in the lock-up in Kilcashel. Further, in delicate and indirect terms, she suggested that the ludicrous blunder of this arrest was entirely Mr. Henry's fault, and that it would be the Sergeant's part, as a man of sense, to dissociate himself from the mistake and do everything to alleviate Mr. West's imprisonment; in particular to arrange for her to see him without delay.

Miss Fitzgerald was a person of infectious convictions. She succeeded in making Sergeant Dunne feel uncomfortable. He would hate to be mixed up in anything that might turn out to be funny. But, for the matter of seeing the prisoner, he referred her to the District Justice.

This Jorkins did not, however, awe Miss Fitzgerald, because she knew him personally. She said that of course it would be all right if she had time to get at Mr. Muldoon. But she was in a hurry.

" But in the case of a capital charge, Miss Fitzgerald," the Sergeant protested unhappily. " I couldn't take it on myself, I couldn't really. And your Pa would be the first to say I shouldn't."

Mr. Mackesey had withdrawn discreetly out of earshot, and stood by the pump which Miss Pringle had given to the town, with his boots in a puddle whose level must have been perceptibly raised by the time he had made up for the length of his talk with the young lady, during which he could not spit. Leaving the pump at the moment when Patricia and Dunne had arrived at deadlock, he sauntered past them, and vouchsafed a sideways nod of the head to his friend the Sergeant.

Andy Mack was not accustomed to depend on the clumsy vehicle of speech to convey his meanings. The Sergeant presumably knew him for one whose wink was better than another man's bond. At any rate, it was after his passing that Dunne changed his mind, and said he supposed it would be no harm for Miss Fitzgerald to see the prisoner for five minutes, so long as it was in the presence of a guard.

She turned to look her gratitude, at least, at Mackesey. But he was not of those who wait to be thanked for services, and she was only in time to see him vanish round the corner.

CHAPTER XXXIII

"JOURNEY'S END——"

YOUNG Guard Lorcan was detailed to supervise the five-minute interview—a duty which embarrassed him exceedingly. He had a heart himself, and could understand other people having their feelings and that a meeting under such circumstances must be something out of the ordinary.

Indeed, Patricia forgot all her practical purposes in the sheer irrational joy of being within the same four walls with Bernard again. Then the nearness and the bareness of the walls recalled her to the actual, and she noticed that Guard Lorcan was blushing.

"Now, what do you want me to do?" she asked, becoming business-like.

"Want you to do?" repeated Pavington, completely vague as to the bearing of the question. What he really wanted her to do was to love him, and he saw in her eyes plainly at last that she did. He might further want her to let him kiss her; but that he could not well explain while Guard Lorcan stood and listened with large red ears.

The guard was naturally well disposed towards the murderer who shed such lustre on the barracks. Mr. West, besides, was very agreeable to deal with, and he might not have meant much harm by what he had done. There were those who said he had a slate off and wasn't responsible. Lorcan turned a delicate back on his colloquy with the young lady, and thought it admirable tact in Miss Fitzgerald that she did not mention the murder nor so much as ask him why he had done it. But West, he thought, should offer some

little excuse himself; and altogether, in all the circumstances, it would be fitter for him to be in a more chastened frame of mind. In which latter particular Miss Fitzgerald's opinion coincided closely with his.

" What is the quickest thing to do? " she demanded of the prisoner, with a little impatience.

" To think of you coming! " was all the answer she elicited. And Lorcan wondered if he too could have forgotten the hangman's noose if a certain maiden in the post office had come to visit him in prison.

Patricia abandoned hope of help from Bernard himself, and suggested that he should think who there was who could most easily prove his alibi.

" Alibi? But I haven't got an alibi."

His slow mind was just beginning to focus itself on the things of the terrestrial sphere. He laughed, and it was so much his way to do what was most inappropriate that Patricia began to be really frightened. It had already occurred to her that he might have permanently forgotten all that had happened immediately before his accident, that it was possible he would have serious difficulty in explaining his movements on the night of the 4th of February.

" Can you *not* remember? " she urged.

" Oh, yes indeed! " he exclaimed suddenly, recalled more or less to the needs of the moment. " I have been wanting badly to send a message—I suppose it's too late to stop Jack and Miss Pringle——"

The conscientious Lorcan interrupted. " Begging your pardons, I understood from the Sergeant yous would only be speaking of private and personal matters."

" Miss Pringle and Mr. Russell are private persons," Patricia pointed out, keeping her temper with difficulty. " In any case, they must have arrived by now."

Lorcan looked out of the barred window at a clock in the convent tower, and saw with relief that Miss Fitzgerald was right. The Dublin train must be in

which, according to information received, was bearing Mr. Russell, for whom the main body of the Civic Guard was lying in wait at Kilcashel station.

"It is most unfortunate," said West. "I meant to have prevented this. I'm afraid I have been intensely idiotic."

"Everyone has been intensely idiotic," said Miss Fitzgerald.

"It has all been such a muddle. They won't let me communicate with my own solicitor——"

"Who's he?" Patricia seized on something definite at last.

"Begging your pardons," Guard Lorcan broke in. "I didn't understand from the Sergeant there was to be solicitors mentioned."

"If Mr. West gives me the name and address of someone he knows, that is a private and personal matter," Miss Fitzgerald pronounced with finality.

The guard, being harassed, made appeal to the prisoner.

"You will understand, sir, I can only go by what the Sergeant says."

"You are quite right, Guard," said Pavington, after considering the matter impartially. "A policeman cannot be too exact in sticking to the letter of his duty. So if there is any doubt of it being allowed, we will leave the solicitor out."

Patricia's temper failed her.

"Am I allowed to mention——" she began.

"Begging your pardon, Miss, but I understood yous would only be speaking to each other for five minutes."

"It's not five minutes yet," Miss Fitzgerald said firmly.

"Ah well, then, I suppose it isn't five minutes."

Lorcan looked despondently out at the clock which gave him the lie. He could not order Miss Fitzgerald out when she did not intend to go. But his ears burned, and he wished himself a hundred miles away.

"I was going to say," Patricia continued, "I saw

Mr. Henry, and got him to send a wire about you to Sir William Babington."

" About me—West? "

" Yes. Why? "

" My dear, he will know nothing on earth about anyone called West! "

Patricia turned in dismay to see the effect of this on the guard. But Lorcan was no longer listening. For some moments sounds had been reaching him muffled from outside. Had the others had any attention to spare they too might have recognised Jack's voice raised with others in loud altercation. Now the general buzz and trampling developed into the noise of a definite scuffle, and Guard Lorcan felt it his imperative duty to go out and see what was up. Even as Patricia looked, he opened the door and slipped away, turning the key in the lock behind him.

Patricia shook the door after him to make sure that he was gone; and the way she did it first woke Pavington to a realisation that she was really rather distracted.

" Now, quick before he comes back," she insisted. " You must tell me quickly—why don't the Babingtons know about you, and who else does? "

" Oh, no one does," he said, trying desperately to be prompt and lucid. " Patricia dear, I'm not West at all. But—but—but will you marry me? "

" *Certainly not*, if you won't attend to a word I say! " Patricia was finally exasperated. Who but Bernard would spend the precious time on these formalities, when he knew perfectly well——?

" Then you will, dear? "

" If you'll give me that lawyer's address," she said—but that was when it was already too late to make conditions to her assent.

" Oh, Findon? "

" No, no. Your own lawyer. Findon's on the other side! Lord Pavington's man."

" Good heavens, I'd forgotten! " he exclaimed in horror. " I haven't told you—and I ought to tell

Lavinia first, because I'm her cousin, you see, and she'd expect it. Old Findon is my lawyer all right, dear, because I'm Pavington."

"*Pavington?*"

"Patricia, you know you've promised."

If she vouchsafed an answer in words it was drowned in the squeaking of guards' boots outside and the rattle of the key in the lock.

CHAPTER XXXIV

ILL NEWS FLIES APACE

to return to Miss Pringle.

That morning, coming down by train from Dublin, she had leisure to think for the first time for weeks. She left Jack and Honor, deliberately, to entertain each other, while she looked out of the window. It occurred to her that most of her life had been like this—sitting in a first-class carriage and looking out at the world through window-glass. But now she felt herself to be, metaphorically, out in the open and exposed to all the winds of fate. Wondering how she had got there, she could not but believe it was something in the kind of clothes that Patricia made her wear. But, further, she knew the fact to be that she had become vitally attached to at least four people. Most so to Jack, of course, because he was most her own; and, besides, a boy was a boy. But there were Honor, Patricia, Bernard too. Nothing could ever now happen to any of them without her feeling it as well. With the four of them on her mind, she must be as liable as other people to griefs and hopes and fears. This was the price of a share in the world's life, and she concluded, on calm reflection, that she was quite ready to pay it.

Jack had to go straight to Kilcashel, to see Henry before the Assizes. But Miss Pringle and Honor got out at Geraldstown West. The Fitzgerald children were on the platform to meet them.

"But what's become of Patricia?" Honor wondered.

"My dear, you did not think she could come to the

station, with all that she'll have on her hands at home!" Miss Pringle protested. And as soon as they were out of the train and had greeted Kitty and Rose, she began to hope that their sister was not quite killing herself getting ready for such an invasion of visitors. Kitty reassured her on that head.

"Rose and I did all that. But of course," she fell into unconscious mimicry of her mother, "poor Pat never does come home but there's a cataclysm to greet her."

"What's a cataclysm, Kitty?" asked Honor, who always laughed at the children's long words.

"It's Mr. West," said Kitty, half-way between tears and importance; and she gave Miss Pringle the note that Patricia had left for her.

"Bernard!" The paper fluttered so wildly in the gusty wind that if Miss Pringle's hand shook as she held it, no one saw.

"'Arrested,'" she read, "'on a serious charge, by some extraordinary mistake of the Civic Guard in Kilcashel.' Guards, indeed! Some extraordinary mistake of Patricia's. What would Bernard be doing in Kilcashel without letting us know? And how could he be arrested——"

"What's the charge?" Honor inquired with mild interest.

"She says—she says she's off to Kilcashel to see about it. Good gracious, what's the earthly use of that? She'll do something impulsive and make everything much worse—if it's true."

Honor had got the note to read for herself.

"Sounds true enough!" she commented, rather amused. "What does she mean by a rumour about Lord Pavington that she hopes is exaggerated?"

Miss Pringle, with her guilty conscience, started. Could Pavington have come home unexpectedly? Truly, misfortunes never came singly. And if only Honor had not pointed it out, she would not have noticed the rumour.

"There isn't one of you that isn't a plague!" she exclaimed. "Except Jack. Why did I let him go before hearing all this?"

"What could he do?" Honor wanted to know. But Miss Pringle did not choose to limit his powers by definition.

"We must drive on to Kilcashel and catch him," she said.

So the children went home forlornly by themselves, and the motor which Kitty had ordered to fetch the visitors to Geraldstown raced the train the ten miles to the town. The youth who drove entered fully into the spirit of emergency, and got them there before the train's smoke had melted on the horizon. He was a competent jehu, and eagle-eyed as well, like all his kind. At the bridge outside the town he drew up suddenly, and said there was someone waving to them. Honor, looking back, recognised the stout figure pursuing them. She was out of the car before Miss Pringle could protest, and running back to meet Mary Reddy. Indeed she was so glad to see that round red face, shining with heat and devotion, that she could even have got over it if Mary had folded her nursling in her arms on the public road, as she came near doing. They had never been parted for so long before. She was mindful of her Aunt Vinie, however, and cut short the ceremonies of reunion.

"What is it, Mary?" she asked, knowing by signs there was something.

"Well, it was Mr. Mackesey—Miss Honor, child, isn't it Heaven's mercy I was looking out for yous and stopped yous, for if yous went on into the town at that bat, you were dead!"

"But what about Andy Mack?"

"It was at the turn where you come in by Finn's I met him, then. He was after being below in the station in the goods store——"

"Honor, are you never coming?" called Miss Pringle, in a fever in the car.

"Hurry up, Mary."

Mary, having her thread broken, went back to the beginning of her story. It was Mr. Mackesey who had heard, through the station telephone, that the ladies were coming on by road from Geraldstown West.

"Then says I, I'll go meet them and break the news. Child, did you hear of Mr. West?"

"Yes, yes, yes. That's why we're here."

"Didn't I say what would happen when we let him away from Derry Lodge and he no more fit to mind himself, God help him——"

"If that's all the news——" Honor moved to run back to the car.

"But did you hear Mr. Russell's took too?"

Honor stopped.

"It's true, child, for it was Mr. Mackesey saw it with the sight of his two eyes. And it's all on the head of Mr. West's own confession. Glory be to God, couldn't me and you a told them he didn't know who he was and they hadn't a right to mind a word he'd say! They say he says he's the man that burned down Castle Pavington in England. That's your Auntie's cousin's place, and he had twelve thousand sovereigns hid in a bag in it, under the floor. They did say it was Mr. West went to rob it, but now they say Mr. Russell was before him, and it was he cut the earl's throat and lifted the money, and he has it buried somewhere in Ardreenan."

It took Honor all the time while Mary was explaining to grasp the purport of the news. Then she was dumb with fury. It was no new thing for Kilcashel to talk through its hat. But that it should act to match! That they should dare to lay hands on her Jack!

The car was backing down on them by Miss Pringle's command. But Mary could not easily let her child go out of her sight again.

"You're shivered with the cold, alanna. Have you ne'er a scarf or a thing?"

Honor's hands were in her pockets, where were sundry items that she had smuggled through the customs—among others a yellow silk handkerchief. She pulled it out and shook it defiantly, and put it round her neck under her coat.

"There." She freed herself from Mary's detaining hands.

"Mind now, pet, and break it nicely to your Auntie."

Honor did her best to obey the last injunction.

"We needn't hurry," she said, getting back into the car. "For we'll not get Jack. He's in jail too."

Miss Pringle made no pretence of unbelief. She did not ask: "What for?" She sat rigid in her place, knowing that it was all because she had run away from Pavington's lawyer and left him to find Jack out as an impostor that this Nemesis had come. It was all her own fault, and she became bitterly angry with Mr. Henry. What did he mean, letting such things happen while she was away? She ordered the car straight to his house, that she might call him to account.

It was fair-day, and Main Street was still thick with livestock and people and carts. Through a forest of cart-creels the driver espied the hood of a car, and said it was Mr. Henry's, and Miss Pringle bade him catch it up.

A motor could only nose its way by inches through the crowd, and a horn was unheard through the squealing of pigs. It had taken Henry twenty minutes to work up from the station. But for once in his life he was in no particular hurry. He was too happy. Like Faust, he would have had the hour delay, it was so fair. For just before he set out to fetch Mr. Findon from the train the answer had come to his telegram to Sir William Babington. Sir William wired: "Know no such person must be some mistake."

So much for the Fitzgerald defence of West. And Russell! With his own eyes he had seen that cub taken up by the guards the minute he set foot on the

platform, and marched off, red in the face and raging.

Truly the hour was sweet. Henry missed none of the glances cast at him, as he made his triumphal progress through the fair. He was the hero of the hour. The one smart man who, from the first, had seen through those vipers whom the whole of the rest of Kilcashel had taken to its heart.

It was Findon's turn to be impatient. Henry had telegraphed the day before that West was in custody and asking for him—Findon, and refusing to give account of his movements on the fatal night to anyone else. He had come hotfoot from London, where he was particularly busy, hoping for a confession that would throw light on poor Pavington's fate, put it beyond doubt one way or the other. He declined to be taken first to the hospitable Mrs. Henry's for refreshment, and chafed at the obstructions that delayed them in reaching the barracks.

Neither of them noticed the car which shot ahead in the clear space in the Square, and it was an entire surprise to them when, alighting, they came face to face with Miss Pringle on the pavement.

Miss Pringle was angry with her man of affairs, firstly because she felt herself to blame, and secondly because she would have been frightened if she had not been angry. Her wrath culminated when he appeared protected by a stranger.

"I'm glad to see you, Mr. Henry," she said, with expressive restraint. "I wish to hear from you what steps you are taking to secure Mr. West's *immediate* release, *and* suitable apologies from all concerned. As to the *extraordinary* rumour that Mr. Russell——" Here she became inarticulate.

Mr. Henry did not hasten to assure her that Mr. Russell was safe in jail and, it was to be hoped, in irons, if he had fought the guards all the way up, as he seemed on for doing. This should have been the crowning moment of Mr. Henry's day, but it was not.

" Well, now, Miss Pringle," he said, " I have to step over to the ' Fitzgerald Arms ' for Muldoon. But Mr. Findon here will tell you the whole story."

The weight of Findon's impatience to get at the prisoner's confession had borne them all down to the barrack door. But the prisoner could not be seen—by others than Miss Fitzgerald—without an order from the District Justice, Mr. Muldoon. Findon was frowning urgently at his colleague to go on and get Muldoon. But Miss Pringle stood in his path and Honor stood beside her.

" Anyway, Miss Pringle," he said, " I can tell you what steps Miss Fitzgerald's been taking. She told me to refer to Sir William Babington and he'd speak for Mr. West, being a family connection. Well, here's the answer."

He thrust the telegram into her hands.

" What did I say? " she observed aside, passing it on to Honor. " Of course it was some mistake—of Patricia's. Mr. Henry, it was quite unnecessary to refer further than to me."

But Henry was half-way to the hotel.

" I'll go after him," said Honor. " To see they don't delay in the bar."

" My dear child! " exclaimed her godmother. But she could not cope with Honor and Mr. Findon at the same time, and Mr. Findon confronted her with an alarming gravity.

" Madam," he asked, " do I understand that you are prepared to take up the cudgels on West's behalf? "

" You may understand, sir," said she, " that Mr. West's arrest is a disgrace to whoever is responsible."

" I am responsible, madam."

" Then you are responsible for what I should not have thought anyone would do who was not quite demented! "

Miss Pringle felt herself under no obligation to mince matters with this Mr. Findon. He was no nobody. She had seen him already, getting off the boat. They

had travelled down in different carriages in the same train, and she had noticed his appearance with approval.

"Miss Pringle," he said, very heavily and sorrowfully, "I fear it is my duty to give you news that will shock you. Obviously you do not know the terrible charge against this West, and have been completely imposed upon by two scoundrels. You do not know that on the 4th of February your cousin and my dear friend, Pavington, disappeared? All my efforts to find him alive have failed, and I am forced to the conclusion—however reluctantly to the horrible conclusion—that he is dead."

If anyone had told Miss Pringle that she was relieved to hear of the decease of the head of her family, she would have been shocked indeed. But she bore the blow with great fortitude.

"That is not all," Findon continued in a harder voice. "In face of the evidence we have accumulated, it is impossible to doubt that Pavington—the best man on earth—was the victim of foul play. And all the evidence goes to fasten the guilt on this West, and on Russell as his accomplice."

When Miss Pringle spoke, it was quite calmly.

"You do not know the people in question, or you would see how monstrous is this accusation, Mr. Findon!"

"It is not I who accuse them, Miss Pringle. It is the facts. What is monstrous is that you, Pavington's own cousin, should defend his murderers. When you know the strength of the circumstantial evidence——"

"I know Jack Russell and Bernard West, Mr. Findon, and you do not."

"But I do know that West and Russell have been paying their way with Bank of England notes which I can identify as those which my poor Pavington had on his person."

As it had never occurred to Miss Pringle that there was any more definite means of telling one bank note from another than one sheep from another, the point

did not carry the same weight for her that it did for Mr. Findon.

"The young man, Russell," he pursued, "is so far charged only with being accessory. But the cold-blooded deliberation with which he has acted his part proves him a hardened criminal, if not, like West, actually red-handed. I will not ask you to take my word for it, but the facts of the case——"

"No facts," said Miss Pringle, "alter the fact that what is impossible is impossible. You are making a very great mistake, Mr. Findon, and I think you will be sorry!"

In other circumstances Miss Pringle would have been the first to recognise the real grief for his friend that made Mr. Findon so bitter in denunciation. She would have been distressed herself about her cousin. But Pavington was a name and an abstraction, and Jack and Bernard were real. Mr. Findon was the enemy, and her voice trembled with the desire to annihilate him as she said: "You will be very sorry, Mr. Findon."

The District Justice arrived at this moment, with his dog and Mr. Henry, and Honor following. Mr. Muldoon was a man of peace with a strong regard for appearances. He could not be seen fighting Miss Pringle on the barracks steps on a fair-day. So he let her in along with the other party, when she said he must.

CHAPTER XXXV

MURDER WILL OUT

IN the guardroom, meanwhile, Jack and the guards were carrying on with unabated heat the argument which had enlivened their walk up from the station—the guards representing his arrest for complicity in the murder as a little matter of form which Mr. Russell should not mind at all, and Mr. Russell unreasonably angry. He might have bowed before the abstract majesty of the law. But Guards Quigley and McLafferty he knew too well.

"The cheek of it," he raged. "When I can prove an absolute alibi and never saw old Pavington in my life!"

The guards said that of course everyone knew that, and nobody had thought otherwise for a moment.

"Then what confounded mutt has gone and signed the warrant? And why can't I get bail?" He had not alone his personal dignity to think of, but the honour of Ardreenan. "Nice thing for Miss Pringle's agent to be stuck in the common jug! And perhaps you think I want to stop the night in this beastly place?"

Quigley and McLafferty entreated him to content himself, and assured him that he would like it real well.

"You tell old Dunne to hop and get me bailed out of this before Miss Pringle hears of it, or there'll be trouble."

Thereupon, Sergeant Dunne appeared at the door, ushering in Miss Pringle, Honor, a small terrier belonging to the District Justice, and a crowd of men.

"That's done it!" said Jack to the guards.

Findon failed to realise that he had one of his criminals before him.

"Where can I see the prisoner?" he demanded of Mr. Muldoon.

"I," said Miss Pringle, "must see Mr. West first, Mr. Muldoon." She had a dim feeling that Bernard was the person most likely to have kept his head in the crisis, and to think of something sensible to do.

Mr. Henry laid hold of Mr. Muldoon by the arm, to hold him to the straight course of duty; and Mr. Muldoon's dog, who had never liked Mr. Henry, laid hold of the latter gentleman by the heel. So arose the confusion of sounds which drew Guard Lorcan rejoicing out of the adjacent cell.

As soon as the Sergeant saw Lorcan, he drew him to one side.

"You let Miss Fitzgerald out the back way, like I told you?" he asked.

"I did not," said Lorcan. "For she wouldn't go."

"Where have you her, then?" the Sergeant inquired, with feeling.

"Inside in the cell—safe enough, for I locked the door."

The dog by this time had been detached from Mr. Henry.

"Sergeant," said the District Justice, "where can Mr. Findon most conveniently see the prisoner?"

Dunne fumbled with his answer, feeling himself in a delicate position. It might be Lorcan's fault that Miss Fitzgerald was locked in with the murderer, but he was responsible, and the door of the cell opened into the room where they all were. He suggested that the best thing would be if Mr. Muldoon and the other gentlemen would go back to the hotel, and he presently brought the prisoner to them. Mr. Muldoon being related to the hotel by marriage, there could be no objections there; and the Sergeant tried to convey by hints that it would be a queer thing to bring out a murderer with the ladies present. But the District

Justice was too much bothered with Henry whispering advice over his shoulder to catch fine shades of meaning.

"Mr. Muldoon," said Miss Pringle, "you understand, I hope, that I have a good deal more right than anyone else to see Mr. West, and I require to see him and Mr. Russell privately before anything else, and then——"

"Ah now, Muldoon," Henry urged, "you should tell Miss Pringle this is no joking matter."

Findon brushed his discursive colleague aside, and interrupted Miss Pringle's further demands.

"I regret," he said sternly. "But you know, Mr. Muldoon, I have not come from London to waste time. I am here to hear this wretched man's confession, and I must insist on seeing him at once——"

"In God's name," said the harassed Muldoon, "let you all see him. Sergeant, unlock that door."

The direct order must needs be obeyed. But when the door was opened, disclosing Miss Fitzgerald as well as the prisoner, Muldoon understood the guard's hesitations, and rather wished for himself that he had never accepted the responsibilities of his post. He had just time to conclude that the great London man was petrified by his horror at the way things were done in Kilcashel, when Findon found his voice and cried out:—

"*Pavington!*"

He seized upon the prisoner and pulled him out into the light and shook him by both hands.

"It *is* you, it *is!* Alive and well. My dear fellow!"

The supposed West responded with as much warmth, if less surprise: "Findon, it's good to see you! Have I been an awful nuisance?"

"No matter when you're alive. I'd given you up—my dear boy!"

The effect of this transaction on the onlookers was such that it took most of them a few seconds to recover their breath. But Patricia slipped to the District Justice's side.

"My dear Mr. Muldoon," she murmured in his ear, "isn't it well the Sergeant had the wit to let me in? It wouldn't do very well for all Kilcashel to think you were as much taken in as poor Mr. Henry. But now you can say—would I have been let in if you had really believed Lord Pavington was guilty of his own murder——?"

It was well that Muldoon was quick to grasp the state of the case, as she could not have commanded her voice to say more with gravity.

Jack was first among the others to come to himself.

"Gosh!" said he, and advanced upon his late familiar associate. "You that beastly blighter? I'd have scragged you quick enough if I'd known before!"

Miss Pringle, out of a confusion of conflicting emotions, could only find to say: "Mr. Findon, I think I told you you were making a mistake."

"Granted," said Findon, magnanimous in his happiness.

He had convinced himself by prolonged shaking of his friend's hand that verily and indeed he had recovered Pavington alive. He began to have leisure to wonder how Pavington came to turn up, in company with an attractive young woman, in the accused man's cell.

"What—er—what about West?" he inquired.

"You may well ask!" said Jack. "West's the biggest humbug unhung. That's West." He indicated the earl with his thumb.

"Indeed, Findon," Pavington began, "I owe you an apology. Indeed, I owe you all apologies—especially my cousin——" The magnitude of his debt overwhelming him, he could find no adequate words.

Mr. Henry's long damp hand was on Findon's sleeve.

"You will remember I told you at the beginning Mr. West was a man you couldn't suspect."

"You are very kind, Mr. Henry," said Pavington gratefully.

"Oh, very well, Mr. Henry," said Findon. "I grant you I've made a fool of myself. But, after all, you know how naturally it all arose out of your discovery of Russell's fraudulence——"

"What is this, Mr. Henry?" asked Miss Pringle.

"Why now, Miss Pringle," Henry said with aggrievement. "You shouldn't ask me anything about the agency. I had nothing to do with it. I wasn't consulted. You should refer to Lord Pavington, since here he is."

But Miss Pringle could not say anything to Lord Pavington. She was too bitterly hurt with him. That Bernard should be Pavington all the time, and not have told her!

Findon was grunting and frowning again.

"I had forgotten this Russell. Is he a fraud, Pavington, or are you responsible for him?"

"As to that," Pavington began, and stopped, not seeing that there was anything he could safely say.

"This is Mr. Russell," said Miss Pringle gently.

Findon faced round and observed the young man at her side, whom he had not previously identified with the hardened schemer of Henry's reports.

"That!" he said.

"And if it is Mr. Henry who has given you the impression that Mr. Russell is a swindler, I think Mr. Henry should explain himself."

"I quite agree with you," said Findon.

With one consent they turned to Mr. Henry, but Henry was not there. They heard the sound of the outer door softly closing, and Honor had hold of the District Justice's terrier.

Findon swung round again, with the full weight of his outraged sense of the normal, upon his friend.

"You mean to tell me, then, Pavington, that you are responsible for this—this very curious arrangement?"

"Yes, I am—responsible, as you put it like that," said Pavington, mindful of Lavinia's little reservations as to Jack's appointment.

"My hat!" said Jack suddenly, diving in his pockets. "That reminds me. If you *are* old Paving-stones, what did you mean by that?"

He thrust the envelope inscribed "For Finder" in Pavington's face, and Pavington snapped it out of his hand with the promptitude of alarm.

"Shut up, you ass!" he whispered, glancing round at the absorbedly interested audience of Civic Guard and Mr. Muldoon.

"I won't shut up. What did you think you were playing at, that day at Brogsford?"

At the word 'Brogsford' Miss Pringle became alert.

"It is not necessary," she said to Jack, "to take up everybody's time with our private explanations."

But Findon could never drop a question, once it was raised, till he had got to the bottom of it.

"Yes, now, about Brogsford," he said slowly and thoughtfully, with characteristic strength of mind, ignoring the ten people who were standing about waiting. "At Brogsford, Pavington, you wrote me a letter, which only reached me many weeks later through Mr. Henry——"

"Oh, *that* letter!" exclaimed Patricia. She emerged from the background with an enlightened expression, and addressed herself so sweetly to Mr. Findon that he ceased to frown. "Please forgive me interrupting, but I must just ask Lord Pavington—did there happen to be twenty thousand pounds in it, if it was that letter?"

"It was," Pavington assured her with perfect comprehension. "There happened to be nothing in it."

"Then Mick Farrelly's character is cleared."

She withdrew into the background again. But she gave Miss Pringle's hand a little confidential touch in passing, which confirmed in that not inobservant lady an impression just received. Lavinia's heart began to soften towards her cousin. His treatment of her had been extremely odd, to say the least of it. But people as happy as that must just be forgiven. In any case,

Jack really had no right to speak to him quite as he did.

Findon resumed his unhurried review of the case. "In that letter, Pavington, you instructed me to find a thoroughly experienced agent for Ardreenan——"

Jack broke out again. "Good Lord, then, West! If you wrote instructions, why didn't you post 'em instead of—of——" Perceiving that he was in a pitfall, he stopped and stuttered and went scarlet.

Miss Pringle's colour was a little heightened too. She addressed herself to the District Justice courteously but with firmness.

"I think you must now be satisfied, Mr. Muldoon, that it was unnecessary to imprison either my cousin or my agent——"

Mr. Muldoon made haste to aver that only the red tape connected with his office had compelled him ever to do anything so preposterous.

"We all have our duty to carry through, whether we like it or not," he apologised. "And if we'd taken it as seriously as all that, and really thought his Lordship could be guilty of the charge—well, would you have found Miss Fitzgerald in having a private chat with him?"

"I rather think we would," said Miss Pringle. "But we are all in your way here, and I should say"—she mustered her flock with her eye—"it was time we all adjourned to the hotel for lunch. Mr. Findon, you will join us?"

CHAPTER XXXVI

"TOUT COMPRENDRE——"

IN the austere dining-room of the 'Fitzgerald Arms,' Mr. Findon sank into a chair with a groan of relief. Now he could go back to London and his comforts with an easy mind.

"Well, Pavington," he exclaimed righteously, "who told you you'd have been better staying at home?"

"You, Findon," his client confessed. "And look how wrong you were."

Findon was astonished. He had expected confusion and hasty explanations, instead of which—he could not be mistaken—the culprit was enjoying the scene he had occasioned.

"If I had stayed at home, my dear Findon, you would never have seen Kilcashel or had the experience of this curious case. Surely that is something to set against the trouble I've given you?"

This was insult added to injury. Findon could only say coldly that he did not yet understand particularly clearly what had been happening.

"And I don't understand at all," Miss Pringle joined in, "why in the name of goodness, Bernard, you couldn't have told us at once who you were when you remembered. I am naturally glad to find that you are my cousin, but I must say your way of introducing yourself is rather peculiar!"

Miss Pringle did not dissemble her indignation, and Findon felt strongly drawn to her.

"Why——?" they demanded together. And the Russell boy added:

"You, Pavingstones! I wonder you've the face to stand there and not put your head in a bag."

The substance of this was exactly what was in Findon's own mind; but he would not have expressed it in that form, nor would it have occurred to him that Pavington was a man to inspire the irreverent affection of the young. He began to notice that these people all reacted to Pavington in ways different from what might have been expected. But he had not sufficient detachment of mind to get to the bottom of the difference there and then, because he was annoyed—and so was that sensible woman, Miss Pringle.

"It isn't even," she was saying, "as if you hadn't told anybody, but I know Patricia's mother knew all about you, and I do *not* see that I, who am your nearest relation, should have been kept in the dark——"

"But, my dearest Cousin Lavinia," the offender interrupted, "I do not see that you are the person to blame me. Seeing how unequivocally clear you made it—in the dairy at Geraldstown, if you remember—that nobody wanted me, I think you must own that I was only doing my best to oblige everybody by suppressing myself."

Miss Fitzgerald, in the window, laughed. Findon had already noted that Miss Fitzgerald was a very attractive young woman—one whose mere presence was like a reflection in the room of the sunshine that redeemed the hideousness of the town outside. Since she was amused, he as a man of impartial mind, had to admit that there might be something funny about the business. Certainly it was funny to have found Pavington and this Miss Fitzgerald locked up together in the town jail. It seemed to Findon that the young lady's friends had passed very lightly over the incident, as though she might be expected to turn up anywhere.

"Findon, you want to know what has been happening?" Pavington turned to him, hastily taking advantage of his lightening mood. "Well, I have only been acting on your own advice."

Findon exclaimed, seeing the astonished interest with which the rest of the company received this statement.

" Do you remember my consulting you about agriculture and a scheme to provide an opportunity for the right young man? You told me to put the thing through myself in my own way, and that is what I have been doing."

Pavington glanced across at Mr. Russell, who seized an opportunity to speak.

" Look here, Pavingstones," he said. " What have you done with my envelope that I got the chit in, and what did you mean by it, anyway? "

Pavington produced an envelope, and laid it on the table for all to see.

" ' For Finder ' "—Miss Pringle and Miss Percival together read the two words scrawled on the back.

" For me," Findon asserted at the same moment.

" Crikes! " exclaimed Russell, as if smitten by a sudden, dazzling enlightenment, and collapsed all over the chair from which Mr. Findon had just risen.

" I did not realise myself at the time," Pavington owned, " how much could be effected by the simple expedient of writing your name, Findon, illegibly, and then losing the letter. Nor could one always count on so happy a coincidence as the railway accident. I quite own that it was a risky experiment, and that it was by luck and not my management that Russell came along, who very properly secured the document and reported the matter to Miss Pringle, who could then take suitable action."

Miss Fitzgerald apparently found herself as fully enlightened as did Mr. Russell. She went over to Miss Pringle, who was looking bewildered, and put a hand through her arm.

" Isn't all well that ends well? " she said. " Now, dear Miss Pringle, you'll be saved the trouble of writing to your cousin for another agent, since here he is in person to settle the matter."

It took Miss Pringle a moment to adjust her ideas to this reminder. She looked at her cousin, and then at her provisional agent, who was sitting quite silent,

tranced in contemplation of the back of her niece's neck. A fold of orange silk had rucked into view over the back of the girl's coat-collar, and it held his eyes as if it were a portent of happy significance.

Miss Pringle shook her head conclusively. It might almost be said that she tossed it, if she had been a lady of less stately demeanour.

"I should not trouble in any case, my dear Patricia," she pronounced. "Jack and I can manage Ardreenan, and settle things *quite* as well as Bernard has done in the past! Not but that I must always have your advice, Bernard, on all sorts of things," she added, with gracious indulgence.

Findon happened to catch Miss Fitzgerald's eye, and they exchanged smiles of admiration for the ability with which Miss Pringle was arranging to keep two useful young men comfortably under her thumb for the future. In spite of himself, Findon's temper was growing benign and cheerful. He found himself exhilarated by the company of these people, who all seemed in their different ways so pleased with life. And he had not realised fully till now how happy it made him too to have got back Pavington alive—back with interest, indeed, for he had never known before how much Pavington was worth having. He might, however, have made more effort to maintain an outraged attitude if his heart had not been melted by Miss Fitzgerald's confiding ways. A singularly attractive girl, this Patricia Fitzgerald.

"Well, Pavington," he observed without rancour, "I suppose you'll tell me it was by my own advice you bolted off and left me thinking you were dead?"

"My dear Findon," Pavington answered, "you did not surely expect me so to underrate your intelligence as to imagine your thinking anything so foolish? Besides—besides, you had given me instructions, very important instructions, which I *have* carried out; and so well, Findon, that you'll forgive me everything when I introduce you to the future Lady Pavington."

"——EVER AFTER"

"MARY AGNES might come home to me yet," said Mrs. Farrelly. "For Miss Pat—that is, Lady Pavington—says when herself and Mr. West go travelling next they'll fetch her."

"If she's in it," said the one visitor.

"Ah, indeed," said the other, "your child may be gone this minute, Mrs. Farrelly, and you not know, the length she is away from you."

The new friends were Lanktree and Mary Reddy, who had stayed on at Geraldstown after the wedding with their respective ladies. Young, thoughtless folk might have sought to cheer Mrs. Farrelly with easy optimism about the daughter whose absence she mourned. But these were women ripe in the knowledge of life and the human heart, who knew that a trouble belittled by others weighs the heavier. So they told the mother that Mary Agnes had likely caught cold on the journey and would be apt to die. And Mrs. Farrelly was greatly soothed and inspirited by their feeling words.

"Look at me complaining," she said in self-reproach. "The many a lone creature there is and not one to take their part—and me with Himself left to me. The good, quite old lad, too, that wouldn't gallop the roads from you."

"Don't be talking, ma'am," the others entreated her. "The blessing you have in him! God send he isn't taken from you sudden."

Mrs. Farrelly wept comfortable tears.

"That's true, that'd be the worst," she agreed. "To be sure, it's a world where every one gets their

own share of trouble; and the best the Lord can do for you, when all's said, is let you have a good come*rade* to face it along of you. And that's what Miss Pat's got herself, praise be to God," she remembered, with renewed cheerfulness.

"Is it his Lordship?" inquired Mary, marking delicately by her detachment the fact that her Mr. West was a good deal more than an appendage to anyone else's Miss Pat.

"It isn't every day you'll marry an e'rrl, either." Lanktree stood for the importance of one related to the house of Ardreenan.

But before partisanship could divide the three round the teapot, there entered to them Anne Shane, hot and blowsy after riding a bicycle out from the town.

"In the name of God will you tell us about the wedding?" she screamed from the doorstep. "Mercy bless us and save us, it's here you see the life. Three foreign generals, they tell me!"

"Indeed an'!" Lanktree muttered, while Mrs. Farrelly was busy receiving the newcomer. "If it was only foreigners they'd have in Geraldstown to see them married. But to say they'd go gather up the like of Mrs. Henry and *Mrs. Mack!* When we have a wedding in Ardreenan——"

"And we might, too, some day or other," Mary put in with significance.

"We'll not have the rubbish of the country in it."

"So the Lord help us," Mary agreed piously.

Nanny Shane pulled her hat off, planked it down among the tea-things, and combed her tousle of hair standing over the table, after which the two other visitors pushed away their cups of tea with unfinished slices of buttered cake in the saucers. The hostess had to swallow her disgust and give no sign. But she did it with the better grace because of the breach which recent events had made between Nanny and Mick. One could put up with the slob for an evening when she was no longer a probable daughter-in-law.

" I'm off t'England," Nanny announced when she had had her tea. " Henries is gone very quite in themselves, these times, and I'm sick of Main Street. I might take a place with Lady Pavington——"

" You're very kind, Miss Shane! " exclaimed Lanktree aside.

" I'm for where there's a bit of life stirring, anyway." With a sigh of envy for the bride, she settled herself by the fire and proceeded to resume the town's talk.

" Isn't his Lordship the boy-O! To say he was working the rebellion in that foreign country all along, and on the run from the foreign police the time he was letting on to be Mr. West. To be sure we might a known there was more than accident in what happened on the railway. It's what they tell me now, it was some of them that wanted him put a stone on the line. Coming to Miss Pringle, he was, to hide him, and didn't he do well? Look at how she never let out a word of who he was till his side had got the victory out there, wherever it is—— But it's yous should know the whole story best. Isn't that the truth of it? "

She had actually become aware of portentous silence on the part of the initiated three.

" As to truth," said Lanktree, speaking scathingly for them all, " it's as true as the most of what they say in Kilcashel, and I couldn't say more than that! "

" Ah, go on." The girl's mind clung to rational explanations. " Do you tell me an e'rrl would go get himself put in jail and no reason at all? "

Lanktree said no more. She only shrugged her shoulders. But the way she did it expressed so adequately her sense of Miss Shane's unutterable ignorance of the motives of the nobility that it conveyed, even to Nanny, the idea that there might be something left for her to learn.

" Well, well," she concluded, with her usual good temper, " it's what Henrieses says——it's the queer world! "

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